Deconstruction and the Ethical in Asian Thought

Edited by
Youru Wang

Routledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy

DECONSTRUCTION AND THE ETHICAL IN ASIAN THOUGHT

Striking parallels between Derrida's deconstruction and certain strategies of eschewing oppositional hierarchies in Asian thought, especially in Buddhism, Daoism and Neo-Confucianism, have attracted much attention from both scholars of Western and Asian philosophy. This book contributes to this discussion by focusing on the ethic of deconstruction, namely the ethical dimension and function of deconstruction in Asian thought. While avoiding reading Western philosophy into Asian thought, it explores some important issues such as the complicated relationship between the aporia of the ethical and the renewal of ethics in both Asian and comparative contexts. Written by many outstanding scholars, twelve studies of these themes cover, for the first time, all major philosophical-religious traditions in Asia, including Hinduism, Indian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and the modern Kyoto School. The result of these studies is significant for the contemporary discourse of the ethical. The studies in this volume not only provide their own critique of the deconstructive ethic in terms of Asian perspectives, addressing the differences between Derridean-Levinasian and Asian ethical thought, but also take a critical stand toward Asian traditions, revealing the weaknesses and limitations of the aporetic ethic, and the need to supplement it with other elements of Asian thought.

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ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN ASIAN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

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LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2007
by Routledge 2 Park Square, Mitton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX 14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge 270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of
Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks
please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Deconstruction and the ethical in Asian thought/edited by Youru Wang.
p. cm.—(Routledge studies in Asian religion and philosophy) Includes bibliographical references
and index. ISBN-13:978-0-415-77016-3 (hardback: alk. paper) 1. Deconstruction.
2. Ethics. 3. Asia—Religion. 4. Philosophy,
Asian. I.Wang, Youru. B809.6.D44 2007 170.95–dc22 2006028058

ISBN 0-203-96427-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-77016-5 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0-203-96427-6 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-77016-3 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-96427-9 (ebk)

IN MEMORY OF
CHARLES WEI-HSUN FU (1933–1996),
BIBHUTI SINGH YADAV (1943–1999) AND
THOSE GOOD DAYS AT TEMPLE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present form of this anthology grew out of a paper session held in 2004 at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion at San Antonio, Texas. As the organizer of that paper session, I would like to thank the steering committee of the philosophy of religion section for their support, without which the development of this volume would not have been possible. I am grateful to all contributors who completed their papers not only in good time but also to a high level of quality, despite their own busy schedules. I thank them for their hard work and kind cooperation. My special thanks go to two anonymous reviewers of this project for their enthusiastic support and helpful suggestions for improving this volume. I would like to thank Thomas Dean for his inspiration and encouragement. My appreciation also goes out to my colleagues, especially Dianne Ashton and David Clowney, at the Philosophy and Religion Department, Rowan University, for their moral support. My daughter Casey and my wife Jing helped me with the editorial work and with other tasks while I was unwell. They deserve my sincere thanks. I would also like to thank Dorothea Schaefter and Tom Bates, from Routledge, for their enthusiasm, patience, and varied assistance. This book is dedicated to my two teachers: Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Bibhuti Singh Yadav.

ABBREVIATIONS

BG	*Bhagavad-Gītā*
CJ	*Chanzong Jicheng*
HPC	*Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ*
HTC	*Xu Zang Jing/Hsu Tsang Ching*
HY	The Harvard-Yenching edition of *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu*
LY	*Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao Chanshi Yulu*
MMK	Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadyamakakārikā*
NKZ	*Nishida kitarō zenshū*
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*

INTRODUCTION

Youru Wang

I can imagine someone might look at the title of this book and object: “Are you talking about deconstruction again? Come on. Derrida died years ago. Why still deconstruction?” In reply, I would simply distinguish two kinds of deconstruction. One kind is the philosophical or intellectual movement associated with the name of Derrida or, more exactly, initiated by him. As a movement, whether it is with Derrida or without, deconstruction will eventually have had its day and no longer draw our attention, once it has become an integral part of the awareness of our philosophical tradition. Another kind of deconstruction is the differential process itself, or what happens to binary oppositions in and of themselves. One cannot reconstruct anything without deconstruction. Deconstruction “is constantly at work and was at work before what we call ‘deconstruction’ started.” In this sense, there is no “after” deconstruction: “there is no end, no beginning, and no after.”[1] Thus deconstruction continues, will continue, and is and will be everywhere, even without Derrida, and even after his death. It is in this second sense that this volume extends the study of deconstruction to the area of Asian thought, and specifically to the issue of deconstruction and the ethical in Asian thought. Inspired by recent discussions of deconstruction and the ethical in continental philosophy, this anthology examines the unique ethical dimension, implications and consequences of disrupting ethical normativity or normative ethics in various Asian philosophical and religious traditions. The anthology explores some important issues such as the complicated relationship between the so-called aporia of the ethical and the renewal of ethics in both Asian and comparative contexts.

I

Since the 1980s, the striking resemblance between Derrida’s deconstruction and certain strategies of eschewing conceptual hierarchies of opposition in Asian thought have gradually drawn scholarly attention and attracted many studies. At the early stage of this trend, however, the studies were represented mostly by individual articles or book-chapters that sought to demonstrate the parallels between Derrida’s strategy and his notion of *différance,* on one hand, and certain Asian strategies and notions, such as those of Buddhism and Daoism, on the other.[2] These studies have the merits of pioneering the comparison, promoting the dialogue between the two sides and introducing the new paradigm for interpreting Asian thought. As time went by, we saw more book-length studies on this subject coming out. The most representative are *Buddhism and Deconstruction* and *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism*.[3] The deconstructive strategies used in the Asian religious-philosophical traditions were examined by these books in a more systematic fashion and closer attention was given to the contextual analysis of these strategies. As a result, the otherness of deconstruction in

the Asian traditions was probed more thoroughly, and deconstruction was used as a hermeneutic tool to rediscover or reinterpret the Asian traditions. However, although these books were published rather recently, they were nonetheless restricted to the comparison between the early Derrida and Asian thought, and focused on the undoing of conceptual-linguistic hierarchies in the Asian traditions in terms of the new paradigm of deconstruction.

Just as the early Derrida's project of deconstruction caused some sharp questioning and criticism of his ethics, the disruption of all dualistic concepts including good/evil in some Asian traditions, such as in Chan/Zen Buddhism and Daoism, recalls some age-old questions of their ethical standing from other Asian traditions such as Confucianism and so on. Historically, scholars, either within or outside these traditions, wondered if this kind of teachings was appropriate.[4] In other words, questions were raised in such a way as to ask: Was this kind of Chan Buddhist or Daoist teachings ethical? Were Chan masters or Daoist philosophers concerned with any morality? Were they capable of, or interested in, providing any ethical teaching? Controversy over these questions continues, even in the modern scholarship of Chan/Zen Buddhism and Daoism. For example, recent scholarship has critically questioned Japanese Zen ethics, with its origin in Mahāyāna Buddhism and Chinese Chan Buddhism. In my view, this book echoes, in one way or another, these recent studies of ethics in the Asian traditions. However, while avoiding the neglect of other approaches to Asian ethical thought, this book confirms the use of deconstruction as a new paradigm or hermeneutic tool. I would argue that as the study of deconstructive strategies throws new light on the understanding of the Asian traditions, as those precursory studies have shown, those age-old questions can now be put in contemporary terms. For instance, one may now ask: What does Chan Buddhist or Daoist deconstruction of good/evil have to do with the ethical? What is the exact relationship between the deconstruction of ethical normativity or normative ethics and the ethical concern of these traditions, if there is any? It seems that a further study of deconstruction in the Asian traditions inevitably calls for an answer to these questions. And no doubt, to answer these questions will greatly advance our understanding and interpretation of Asian ethical thought.

Recently, critical studies of European continental philosophy have elaborated on the relationship between Derrida's deconstructive project and its ethic. Despite the continuous accusation of Derrida's lack of interest in doing any ethics, and despite his own claim that he never proposed anything,[5] his later works are more closely related to ethical and political issues. The critical examinations of his works reveal that the theme—alterity or the irreducible singularity of the other—underlying Derrida's deconstructive project has an ethical import, and that deconstruction provides a new way of thinking about some problems or concepts traditionally posed by ethics, such as responsibility, decision, law, justice, and duty.[6] These studies indicate that although deconstruction does not propose any normative ethics but rather subverts it, showing ethics deconstructing itself, something archiethical nonetheless survives the deconstruction or appears as its resource. Deconstruction, in line with Levinasian thought,[7] profoundly explicates the non-ethical opening of the ethical, the condition of the possibilities of ethics, or the so-called aporia of the ethical—the path of non-path to the ethical, the impossible possibility of the ethical, or the paradoxical or antinomic of the ethical. In other words, deconstruction goes beyond normative ethics in order to disclose its condition of

possibilities, its context, or the deep structure of the ethical, which is more powerful than any derivative moral norms, rules, or principles. This “going beyond” the normative distinction of good/ evil, or right/wrong, and delving into the condition of the ethical does not mean that the deconstructive project welcomes or approves any actual wrong-doings or evil acts, since it nonetheless elaborates on the foundationless foundation of all ethics. There is an undeniable underlying connection between deconstruction and the ethical. Once we come to understand this connection, this twist or detour, it becomes quite clear that deconstruction does not deny ethics but rather exposes the limit of any ethics. This kind of liminological thinking could lead us toward the rethinking of the way we have been doing ethics and open up more possibilities for the subject.

Absorbing inspirations and insights from these contemporary discussions of deconstruction and the ethical, while avoiding reading Western philosophy into Asian thought, this anthology centers on the other case of the ethic of deconstruction, namely, on the ethical dimension and function of deconstruction in various Asian traditions. The studies contained in this volume are not limited to just a couple of Asian traditions such as Buddhism and Daoism, but cover, for the first time, all major philosophical-religious traditions in Asia, including Hinduism, Indian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and the modern Kyoto School. This feature is very meaningful, since one can find through this anthology that all major Asian traditions have involved, in one way or another, the deconstruction of normative ethics or ethical normativity and therefore faced the problem of the relation between deconstruction and the ethical. Although the chapters included in this anthology deal with different traditions or schools of Asian thought and therefore proceed from different contexts or approach the issue from different angles, their investigations are conducted under this general theme. By borrowing insights and certain terms from the contemporary discussion of Derridean deconstruction and its ethic, or using the Derridean-Levinasian ethic as a paradigm for comparison or interpretation, the chapters attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the relationship between deconstruction and the ethical in all these Asian traditions. All the chapters probe this central issue by examining some of the following aspects.

First, they demonstrate and analyze respectively how the *Bhagavad-Gītā* of Hinduism, Buddhists, Chan/Zen masters, Daoist thinkers, Neo-Confucian followers of Wang Yangming, or Nishida of the Kyoto School, suspend the reified conceptual hierarchy of good/evil, or the metaphysical/dualistic ground of normative ethics or ethical normativity.

Second, they investigate the underlying themes of such deconstructive operations. For instance, for Buddhists and Nishida, it is a dynamic and relational perspective of the interdependence of the self and the other, or the self and the world, that underlies their subversive maneuver and involves profound ethical significance. For Daoist Zhuangzi and Laozi, it is a perspective of how one acts on the basis of what one does not know and cannot control, on the basis of a deep uncertainty of relationships, that underlies their deconstruction of normative ethics, and is ethically forceful.

Third, the chapters thus reveal that the deconstruction of normative ethics or ethical normativity in these traditions calls for a rethinking of the ethical rather than obliterating it. The underlying ethical theme or dimension of their deconstruction brings forth an awareness of the antinomy or double-bind of the ethical, of what conditions and limits it, or what makes it possible.

Fourth, this anthology probes an important aspect of continental philosophy—the ethic of deconstruction—in its other context. It not only attempts to offer a contemporary answer to an age-old question for these Asian religions and philosophies, but it also echoes the recent ethical turn and the turn to religion in continental philosophy by articulating the other perspectives on this same issue. The result seems significant for the contemporary discourse of the ethical. For instance, although many studies in this volume borrow insights from Derridean deconstruction, they nonetheless provide their own critique of the latter in terms of Asian perspectives, or address the differences from the latter. For instance, the Derridean aporia or double-bind cannot be solved forever, but for Buddhists, there is a way out. Moreover, although Derrida's deconstruction of institutionalized norms avoids the denial of normative ethics, Derrida is too vague and imprecise to handle both deconstruction and doing ethics. Although Buddhists face a similar problem, the Buddhist teaching of two truths more skillfully allows Buddhists to both transcend and work with normative ethics.

Fifth, while engaging in rediscovering the ethical dimension of these Asian traditions, challenging conventional interpretations, this anthology also includes chapters that take a critical stand toward these traditions, addressing the weaknesses and limitations of the aporetic ethic, and revealing the need to supplement it with other elements of Asian thought, for instance, the teaching of two truths in Buddhism, and with ethical critique.

The chapters in this anthology as a whole, I believe, will contribute to the deepening and enrichment of contemporary ethical discourse in a global context by bridging Asia and the West, while articulating important Asian perspectives in contemporary terms.

II

This anthology is divided into two parts. The first part includes seven chapters and deals with ethical dimensions and the deconstructions of normative ethics in various Asian traditions. The second part includes five chapters and focuses on similarities and differences between Derridean-Levinasian and Asian ethical thought. The division of these chapters is somewhat arbitrary and mainly for convenience. It is true that chapters in the second part involve neater and more formal comparison between Derridean deconstruction and Asian ethical thought than those in the first part, but this division does not totally exclude comparison from the first part. Chapters in the first part tend more to use deconstruction as a paradigm or hermeneutical tool to interpret Asian thought, and less to engage in a direct or formal comparison with the latter, but they do engage in dialogue with the latter. Furthermore, the sequence of chapters in each part follows a kind of geographic and historical order according to the contents of the studies, ranging from India, China, and Korea to Japan, and from the ancient to the modern period.

Chapter 1 is Bilimoria's article "Dismantling normativity in Indian ethics—from Vedic altarity to the *Gītā's* alterity." He starts with an examination of Vedic normative ethics—a transcendental framework of privileging a certain class and its ordained agency ahead of all else and of the larger other (class), based on the imperatives of a ritual cosmology and rites discourse. Although the justification for this normative framework was the "divine" ordering of things, the normative framework itself is the product of historical conscience. In other words, the normative structure and power are not without

underlying challenges and uncertainties in the historical process. Moral dilemmas, antinomies, and irresoluble conflicts are always already there. The author introduces this process, showing how these things gradually came to the surface. He demonstrates "how the gradual process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the normative Vedic moral framework undermines the later." It occurs first through three heteronymous ethical concepts—dharma, karma, and *puruṣārtha*—which serve to destabilize the very grounds and presuppositions of Vedic moral belief. The deconstruction culminates, in the classical period, in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The author analyzes the important aspects of the *Gītā's* interruption of Vedic normativity. First, the action advocated by the *Gītā* is no longer undertaken for the satisfaction of personal desires but for the benefit of all beings—a reversal of Vedic egological amorality. An ethics of acting is conjoined with the necessity of alterity, extended beyond Vedic rituals and the more rigidly circumscribed caste duties. Second, emphasis is given to the devotion to the Other, the Other that is a not the dualistic authority bifurcated from the world, but rather the totality of all the others, of all beings and non-beings, self and non-self. The Vedic sacrificial offering in the altarity of ego is transformed into a sacrifice that returns one to the face of the other, the other as oneself. Finally, the idea of entitlement *(adhikāra)*, a move from the discourse of duties to the intentionality in the motivation of action, applies to the broader context of social dharma beyond the rites ethic, granting a kind of rights to all people in the art of devotion.

Chapter 2, Berger's "Deconstruction, aporia and justice in Nāgārjuna's empty ethics," discusses the notion of *svabhāva* used by two early Buddhist schools, Vaibhāṣika and Sarvāstivāda. According to his analysis, a better English translation of *svabhāva*, in this context, would be "self-production" or "autonomy." The use of the notion by the two schools fuels a fundamental moral opposition or tension between two forms of life, bondage (of rebirth) and freedom, which are brought about by the constituent behavioral causes of each. It also provides a standard for distinguishing between acts of right and wrong, to lead to the path of virtue. The deconstructive drive of Nāgārjuna is to dissolve this opposition or tension, and overturn the moral dualism with his notion of emptiness *(śūnyatā)*. Based on the chapters from Nāgārjuna's famous *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the author examines how Nāgārjuna deconstructs the notions of autonomy and freedom isolated from influences and advocates a relational vision of interactional interdependence and mutual freedom. Nāgārjuna accomplishes his task with three maneuvers. First, to replace non-relational moral dualism, he interprets action (karma) metaphorically as debt and Buddhist practice as its repayment, and therefore emphasizes the social relation of action, the interpersonal bond and the commitment to the other. "[T]he hope for freedom is bound through a sense of indebtedness to the other, and can be gained only through the work of fulfilling one's obligation to the other." Second, he portrays Buddhist practice not as reclusive discipline withdrawn from common social activities, but as a mirror of orderly conduct under the common law. Freedom could not be attained without relying on the moral model of mutual obligations enjoined in socially constructed "orderly conduct *(vyavahāra)*." Worldly law thus should not be rejected by Buddhist practice. Third, bridging the gap between the world and the freedom, Nāgārjuna's empty ethics insists that right and wrong, justice and injustice, exist only in a co-productive relationship. If actions have their own self-generated capacities, then an unenlightened person can have no hope of reaching enlightenment. The author believes

that although Nāgārjuna shares with Derrida a vision of justice that deconstructs transcendental principles of conduct, his throughgoing non-dualism may reject the Derridean aporia and the tension between law and justice or giver and recipient, and the latter's demands of pure giving and absolute hospitality.

Lusthaus offers, to some extent, a brief depiction of early Chinese intellectual history for his discussion of Zhuangzi in Chapter 3, "Zhuangzi's ethics of deconstructing moralistic self-imprisonment: standards without standards." Zhuangzi, in line with Laozi, challenges the very idea that standards solve rather than create social problems. For Zhuangzi and Laozi, codes of standards do not engender social harmony. Instead they create the contentious lines across which social friction grows. Lusthaus particularly examines chapter 38 of the *Daodejing* and Laozi's arguments: moralistic pursuits leading to moral decline, good intentions accomplishing the opposite of what they aim for, abandonment of standards and their justifications, the unpredictability of outcomes, and so on. These are themes and issues to which Zhuangzi returns frequently. For his aporetic ethics, Zhuangzi establishes two models: the Temporality-Knowledge model and the Perspectival model. For the former, Zhuangzi argues that since knowledge does not program everything in advance, it remains suspended and undecided as to action. A great sage therefore knows what he doesn't know and can't control—the foundation of the ethics. For the Perspectival model, Zhuangzi stresses that although the perspective of *Dao* lacks the justificatory requisites by which one could esteem it above any other perspective, such as personal or communal standards, it is the condition upon which all other values depend. Lusthaus also examines Zhuangzi's Eight Virtues model and interprets his point that "dividers no longer divide" and discriminators are indiscriminate.[8] However, to see Zhuangzi's critique of setting standards more clearly, Lusthaus shows us what sort of standards—and what sort of arguments justifying standards—were floated in those days. One of the most typical examples is the *Mozi*. Mozi advocates that a ruler should unify the wills in the world by unified standards. The foundation of these standards is established by Heaven and therefore they must be communally complied with. Zhuangzi forcefully refutes this, and demonstrates how pursuit of reality via this kind of idealization distances one from the reality one seeks. The ideal blinds one to the reality always already available everywhere. The promotion of such idealization or standardization is a form of voluntary imprisonment into which those desiring to be virtuous blindly devote their energies.

In Chapter 4, "Deconstructing karma and the aporia of the ethical in Hongzhou Chan Buddhism," Wang meditates on the deconstructive operations performed by those Chan masters in the Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism. The masters are well known for deconstructing all binary distinctions, including good and evil. One example of such deconstructions is that of the concept of karma. The traditional distinction of good/bad karma, the privileging of good karma over bad, even the soteriological goal over karmic bondage, is radically overturned or interrupted by these Chan masters. The deconstruction has caused critical questions about the ethical positions of these masters from both Buddhists and non-Buddhists since ancient times. However, Wang discovers that the Hongzhou masters sometimes do return to the familiar moral teaching of karma after deconstructing it. Wang thus studies the questions: What is the ethical meaning or consequence of their deconstruction of good/evil? Is there any underlying consistency between its radical deconstruction and its maintaining or returning to morality? Wang

investigates the context of the Hongzhou deconstruction. The masters stress that Chan Buddhists should not privilege purity over impurity, or the true mind over the ordinary mind, to such a degree as to isolate and separate practices of Buddhism from everyday activities and from flowing reality. They prefer a relational, dynamic, and non-dualistic perspective of Buddhist practice and ordinary activity, soteriological goal and the samsaric world. This perspective enables Hongzhou masters to transcend the separation of true/deluded or good/evil, seeing them not only as mutually contrasting but also as mutually conditioning. Wang indicates that this deconstruction reinforces rather than obstructs the ethical dimension of Buddhism. It suspends the reified or privileged concepts of good karma, discipline, cultivation or realization by exposing the impossibility of any isolated or fixed "good." It draws attention to the flowing reality of interdependence, the only realm in which morality as part of the soteriological path makes sense and becomes indispensable. Consequently, the Hongzhou School practices "wearing out karma merely according to conditions as they are." Although this attitude seems to discourage normative ethics, it nonetheless strengthens the ethical by bringing forth the condition of the ethical, or what makes the ethical possible. The aporia or antinomy of the ethical for these masters is simply that to let ethical teachings work, they must go beyond or detach themselves from them.

In Chapter 5, "The ethics of being and non-being: Confucian contestations on human nature *(xing)* in late imperial China," Ng provides a contemporary reading of the late sixteenth-century Chinese Confucian contestations over the question of selfhood in terms of the conception of human nature *(xing)* as both transcendent and immanent. The debates, more concretely, are over the assertion that the self's original being or nature *(xing)* is beyond good and evil, which was proposed first by the famous Neo-Confucian master Wang Yangming. One group of Yangming's disciples thinks that the absence of the distinction between good and evil brings forth ethical confusion and engenders the wrong idea that one can inherit the original goodness without the need for moral cultivation. While accepting Yangming's thesis that original mind or nature is neither good nor evil, this group stresses that ultimate reality is concretely good and not reducible to a nothingness that nullifies the distinction between good and evil. In everyday life, one cannot escape the facts of good and evil and has no choice but to engage in learning and cultivation. Contrary to this group's ethics of being, the other group elaborates on an ethics of non-being. The latter argues that the ultimate being or the Great Ultimate *(taiji)* is non-being, which has no opposite. The access to this transcendence begins with the dismantling of good and evil. In the absence of evil, goodness in the ordinary sense does not exist. The solicited virtues that connote the good are posterior constructions only. The scholars in this group believe that persuaded and induced good is not genuine, and much factional strife generates more harm than good. The ethics of non-being is thus trans-moral and supraethical, resisting subjection to methods. Ng points out that while the former camp asserts the being of the substantive good and the latter group the non-being of the transcendent good, in both quests for the ground of ethics there is no disappearance of the self, though relational, and the obliteration of the knowing subject. Even the proponents of the non-being of the self and nature never eschew public engagement, nor do they have to make the difficult transition from exploring decisions to making the decision. The emphasis on the non-ness of being comes from the detachment to the idea of the good. It entails the forgetting of the good

while doing the good—the spontaneity in moral cultivation and socio-ethical activism. Ng finally argues that the Confucian conception of the self, in contradistinction to the modernist substantialist counterpart, may also elide the postmodernist charges and challenges.

Chapter 6, Loy's "Lacking ethics," focuses on two types of deconstruction in Māhāyana, especially Chan/Zen, Buddhism: the deconstruction of good/ evil and the deconstruction of self/other. Loy first elaborates on the theme that much of the world's suffering is a result of our delusive ways of thinking about good and evil by ignoring the meaning of each dependent on the other. When we distinguish between antithetical ethical terms it is usually because we prefer one of them to the other. In fact, we can't feel we are good unless we are fighting against evil. It becomes an easy, satisfying way of making sense of the world and reassuring ourselves of our role (the good guys) within it. This ethical dualism is grounded in the more fundamental dualism of self/other. To deconstruct self/other reveals the archi-ethical dimension of Buddhism. In Dōgen's Zen, meditation practice helps to "forget oneself." This "forgetting oneself" is how one can lose one's sense of separation and realize that one's life and destiny cannot be extricated from that of "others" in the world. In this way responsibility for others arises naturally as the expression of genuine awakening. Furthermore, the concern for others here is not a kind of self-sacrifice: to help others is to help one's self, for no one is really saved until all are saved. However, Loy next discusses the issue of deconstructing the "wego-self." He points out that non-duality, although implying universal compassion in principle, due to its vagueness, can encourage a type of ethical relativism in practice, which appropriates Buddhist awakening according to prevailing social norms. He finds a related problem in Japanese Zen: a deconstructed ego-self nevertheless defers to a collective "wego-self," which has institutionalized a form of collective dualism: a group-ego still understanding itself in opposition to a group-other. The Zen deconstruction of ethics here has failed to liberate any "archi-ethical" except feudal loyalty. This suggests the need to supplement the deconstruction of ethics with a contemporary Buddhist ethical critique of institutions. Loy also indicates that the deconstruction of self should strike at the source of much of our unethical behavior, because it weakens many of the motivations that incline us to act unethically. He explores how the deconstruction of self can transform a deep sense of lack, the much worried no-thing-ness at the core of one's life, into a serenity. In conclusion, he emphasizes that it is unwise to abandon the lower truth of the ethical unless one has a clear awareness of the higher truth or archi-ethical that motivates bodhisattvas.

Chapter 7, "The ethical and the non-ethical: Nishida's methodic subversion," written by Kopf, first introduces Nishida's characterization of two basic modes of traditional philosophy and ethics as objectivist or heteronomous versus subjectivist or autonomous. Nishida rejects both these modes by exposing their internal inconsistencies and proposes a third, non-dual standpoint of his own. He frames this non-dual paradigm in such paradoxical terms as "self-identity of absolute contradictories." His attempt is to break the traditional dualistic paradigm without falling into a oneness. He especially uses the term "*soku,*" which Kopf translates as "and-yet," to link many traditional opposites, in such expressions as "one-and-yet-many" and "affirmation-and-yet-negation." In this way Nishida's paradigm not only reconciles two opposite, relative standpoints but also allows its own negation, the self-negation of the absolute. Deviating from the traditional

interpretation of Nishida's non-dualism as mysticism or absolutism and drawing attention to its similarities with contemporary deconstructionist projects (those of Derrida, Taylor, and Bennington), Kopf argues that Nishida's non-dualism should be seen as a systematic subversion of traditional philosophical categories. Only in this sense can his philosophy of the self-identity of absolute contradictories including good and evil be understood correctly. After subverting traditional metaphysical-ethical vocabulary, Nishida discloses the archi-ethical with his radical non-dualism rather than abandoning the ethical. For Nishida, not only are good and evil relative to each other, but the world of engagement undermines these rigid conceptions. The "unifying activity" in which the individual engages with the world or the world that transforms itself is neither good nor evil—this is the ambiguity of historical reality. The ambiguity does not erase the notion of evil, but locates good and evil in infinite conflict without resolution. The historical world, or human existence, for Nishida, is therefore inherently demonic due to its ambiguity or its contradiction. However, Nishida avoids making any normative claims. What Nishida attempts is a practice rooted in this ambiguity. Ethics is context based and cannot be universalized. No one individual is absolutely good or absolutely evil. The unity of universe and its plurality cannot be destroyed. This principle of the one-and-yet-many does not justify evil doings. It rejects an ethics of judgment in favor of an ethics of understanding. The archi-ethical is thus more related to religious practice than to normative ethics.

Chapter 8, "Ethics and the subversion of conceptual reification in Levinas and Śāntideva," written by Edelglass, argues that while Śāntideva's ethics, embodied in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* in some aspects resembles virtue ethics, consequentialism and deontology, it cannot be reduced to any one of them simply because Śāntideva employs a plurality of moral theories. Being cautious of its limitations, however, Edelglass acknowledges the helpfulness of utilizing Western moral theories and making comparative interpretations. In this chapter, he investigates how Levinas and Śāntideva share a concern for the moral dimension of the self-sub version of conceptual reification. Edelglass first draws our attention to the differences of two thinkers. For example, Śāntideva would take Levinas's preservation of difference to be absolutism and Levinas would consider Śāntideva's overcoming alterity to be a totalization, due to their different cultural backgrounds, language games, or conceptual schemes. However, there are some significant resonances between them. Both are committed to a radical, asymmetrical ethics in which the moral subject serves the other without seeking reciprocity: either emphasizing an excessive responsibility for the other or opening the mind to the suffering of others by liberating the self from self-cherishing. Both situate the locus of morality and ethical subjectivity in compassion. With regard to conceptual reification, Levinas underlines that the singularity and the meaning of the infinite Other, the ethical demand, resists all attempts at assimilation or conceptualization. He seeks to break free from the spell of ontological language and practice a kind of language that maintains openness to alterity—the self-subverting activity of "unsaying the said." Since the Other is always outside any horizon of systematic structures, indicating the saying beyond the said or any totalized language, Levinas advocates a reduction from the said to the saying. The possibility can be realized in a discourse of disclosing the otherwise than being, rupturing the structure of essence and totalities. It is a moral response to the Other. For Śāntideva, the fundamental conceptual error we make is to impute inherent existence to the object

when it is empty of inherent existence. Objects do exist, but precisely as mentally imputed dependent designations. Even conceptual and verbal expressions of emptiness run the risk of reification. Thus wisdom is manifest in the self-subversion of one's own words, perceptions, and concepts. The deconstruction of conceptual reification makes possible the compassionate response to the suffering other.

Nuyen's "Levinas and Laozi on the deconstruction of ethics," as Chapter 9 of this book, contends that both Levinas and Laozi speak of ethics deconstructively. By "speaking deconstructively," Nuyen refers to the strategy of invoking some undecidable element that is both outside a particular structure of thought and apt to disrupt this structure. Both Levinas and Laozi reject the idea that we can conceptualize the "other," and show that this non-conceptualizable or unnamable "other" disrupts and undermines ethical claims and judgments made on the basis of ethical principles, or moral laws, posited in traditional moral theories. For Laozi, the *dao* speaks through the *de,* making *de* not just a virtuous way but also a power to disrupt or undermine our traditional ways of seeing our ethical relationships with others. In the *Daodejing, de* stands to *dao* as Levinas's ethic of responsibility stands to the otherwise of Being or to the Infinite. Nuyen admits that Levinas and Laozi differ on the notion of the other. For one thing, Laozi's other has to do with the *dao,* and there is really nothing that corresponds to it in Levinas. But Nuyen shows a very interesting way of interpreting Laozi through the comparison with Levinas. Just as Levinas urges an ethics not explicable in the words of the *said* but allowing us to remain within the proximity of the *saying* of the other, Laozi urges that we follow "the teaching that uses no words" *(bu yan zhi jiao),* the *de* that allows us to remain in proximity of the *dao.* In other words, the secrets of the *dao* can somehow be accessed only through the accomplishment of the *de.* We should not seek to know the *dao* or ask about it by conceptualization but simply to behave ethically or virtuously. For example, to accomplish the *de* is to break out from the totality of one's own being. Being selfless, "without thought of self *(wusi),*" the sage manages "to accomplish his private ends *(si)*" of confirming his own subjectivity. This teaching echoes Levinas's idea that acting ethically toward others is not self-effacing but the exact opposite. Moreover, Laozi's teaching of "taking no action" should be understood as acting to serve others in a disinterested way, to benefit others naturally, not out of some determinate interest, including the interest in cultivating "benevolence" *(ren)* and "rectitude" *(yi).* The person of the highest virtue for Laozi is the one who "does not keep to virtue," namely, has no interest in being virtuous. This resonates with Levinas's description of ethical behavior as "disinter-ested" behavior.

Magliola's "Hongzhou Chan Buddhism, and Derrida late and early: justice, ethics, and karma," as Chapter 10 of the book, centers on the samenesses and differences between Derrida's "impossible justice" and the Hongzhou Chan Buddhist suspension of normative ethics. Derrida argues that law and justice constitute a double-bind. The experience of justice is impossible since doing justice for someone necessarily hurts other(s)—the "third party"—unjustly and vice versa, and yet one is ethically bound to choose between them—choosing what seems to cause the lesser hurt and doing so only in one's hope. For Derrida, ethics therefore is constitutively pervertible. However, Magliola disagrees with the accusation that Derrida annuls a normative ethics and replaces it with a non-institutionalized ethics. Magliola contends that deconstruction does not and cannot replace the body in which it acts; rather, it displaces but necessarily retains the body

including an institutionalized ethics, as Derrida made it very clear in his UNESCO lecture. Despite Derrida's admitted relation with institutionalized codes, Magliola criticizes the unsatisfactory nature of Derridean ethics as being too ambiguous though not antinomian. Hongzhou Chan—in the case of the practitioner who is not yet perfectly free of attachment—imposes its own double-bind: even normatively good acts generate bad karma insofar as one is attached to them or to their fruits. The harm is done to oneself, however, and not necessarily to the other at all. The further dissimilarity is that for Chan Buddhists there is a way out of this double-bind, i.e., the state of non-attachment. Moreover, for Derrida, the machinery of the world is perverse, but for Buddhism and Chan, the karmic law of the universe is perfectly just. Although the Hongzhou master Mazu kept the precepts and other norms, Magliola argues that Mazu's teaching of detachment from good karma runs the risk of antinomianism, and therefore it should be counterbalanced by the Buddhist teaching of two truths, which interprets reality as both transcendent and conventional. The advantage of this counterbalance is that it allows the same social legislation to be seen as both ultimately empty and conventionally effective; thus it allows challenging institutionalized social injustice but does not threaten its conventional status. Buddhist masters can still make interventions in the public arena for the suspension of unjust social legislation, although they must argue on the basis of the conventional. They can still teach apposite situational bracketing-out of moral codes, but must be willing to incur the conventional penalties for the violation.

In Chapter 11, "Transgression and ethics of tension: Wŏnhyo and Derrida on institutional authority," Park outlines the "mad monk" and scholar Wŏnhyo's position on bodhisattva precepts. Wŏnhyo thinks that precepts do not exist through their intrinsic essence but rather are constructed by conditions; this non-substantiality of precepts does not negate their existence; if the practitioner fails to practice the non-substantial aspect and attaches to the idea of observation, observing precepts will ironically turn out to be its violation. This kind of position, Park suggests, should be understood in a broader context of the non-substantialist mode of thinking on ethics. It points to a general theme: preserving ethics itself contains a potential danger of producing an opposite result. Ethics itself could be unethical. Park connects her interpretation with Derrida's discussion on violence and the law. What Wŏnhyo might call the ultimate non-foundationalism of precepts is to Derrida the fundamental violence of laws. If we place side by side Derrida's view on violence, law, and justice, and Wŏnhyo's view on precepts, we can see that elements of their discourses are interestingly overlapping. Both bodhisattva precepts for the Buddhist community and laws in a nation-state are created in the process of institutionalization. Institutionalization becomes possible through appropriation and domestication, and, thus, through reification of entities, which by nature to both Derrida and Wŏnhyo exist only in differential process or conditionality. There is no meta-language in relation to the performativity of institutive codes to Derrida. To Wŏnhyo, no meta-language for precepts should exist. As much as the force of law is violence, provisionality of precepts should always remain on the horizon of the practitioner's understanding and observation of precepts. Park also distinguishes faith-based ethics, such as Wŏnhyo's, which begins with the individual's inner transformation and takes the form of singularity, from rule-based ethics, which begins outside of ethical agency and claims to be universal. But what does "to have faith in" mean in Wŏnhyo? To have faith is to live the tension between the provisional and ultimate reality without resolution. In

order for the practitioner to sustain the faith, the tension between the institutionalized precepts and the singularity of each incidence must be maintained. What lies behind the "mad-monk" scene is that the deviation from normality reveals the inappropriate constraints of institutionalized life. The transgression marks the very limits of institution but without endorsing its replacement. The transgression-theme in this sense does not offer any harmonizing vision in East Asian Buddhism.

The last chapter is Forte's "The ethics of attainment: the meaning of the ethical in Dōgen and Derrida." He begins with the observation that both Derrida and Dōgen inherited a bifurcated structure of transcendence and immanence for the meaning of the ethical through their respective traditions—Derrida in the Platonic and Aristotelian formulations of the ethical and Dōgen in the early Buddhist and especially Mahāyāna claims of enlightenment. Forte then examines how each thinker attempts to overcome traditional bifurcated structures of the ethical and to provide a new meaning of the ethical. Derrida avoids the modernist arrogance of attainment through immanent reason and the Platonic transcendent metaphysics by allowing the meaning of the ethical to remain open through the differing/deferring process of all human ethical assertions, thus revealing new possibilities of ethical life. Dōgen radicalizes the meaning of Buddha-nature so that the meaning of enlightened ethical life is freed from the limits of attainment and non-attainment, and is manifested in the ethical possibilities of any given moment of life. Based on his detailed investigations, Forte draws some interesting points in the comparison not only between Derrida and Dōgen but also between Derrida and Mahāyāna Buddhism before Dōgen. Forte finds, for example, that Derrida, rejecting the immanent presence of the ethical as such, prefers a transcendent meaning in the possibility of the ethical, a recognition of the "not yet" or the incompleteness in both the philosophical and practical expressions of this possibility. This "not yet" ethical vision is shared with the "not yet" of the bodhisattva as depicted in the Indian Mahāyāna, which also prefers to structure the meaning of the ethical in the transcendent. Moreover, the ethical structures of both Derrida and the Mahāyāna function as a space left open for the further deepening of ethical insight and for further ethical actions. For Derrida, the possible is left open by the recognition of non-attainability. For the Mahāyāna, although it requires many lifetimes, the bodhisattva lives their vow to save all sentient beings as though it were possible. However, Dōgen, in contrast, replaces both the "not yet," transcendent vision of the ethical in the bodhisattva path and the immanent meaning of Buddha-nature as potential with his notion of whole-being Buddha-nature, the interdependence of all beings at every now moment. Thus for Dōgen, although the ethical is not closed off in the sense of completion, the promise of attainment or all ethical possibility is to be found in the here and now, in the every response to the situation.

As we can now see, even over the same topics or issues of common interest, the authors provide quite different and even opposite views. There is no unifying voice to be found in all the chapters, and I don't see any need for such a unifying voice. Diversity is a unique aspect characteristic not only of Asian traditions themselves but also of the interpretations and comparative studies of them present in this anthology, which, I hope, will inspire or give rise to more diverse interpretations and explorations in contemporary and future ethical discourse.

Notes

1 Derrida, 1999, 65.

2 Over two decades, there were only two major books on this subject: Magliola's pioneering book *Derrida on the Mend* (1984), comparing Derrida with Nāgārjuna, and Coward's *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (1990), involving comparisons with more Indian philosophers.

3 See Youxuan Wang, 2001, and Youru Wang, 2003. Most recently, see J.Y.Park's anthology *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (2006), but it shares the same characteristics with those I mention here.

4 For example, even within the Chinese Chan Buddhist tradition, Zongmi criticized the Hongzhou School's deconstruction of the concept of karma and other moral norms. See Youru Wang's chapter in this book (Chapter 4) and Gregory, 1991, 238.

5 Derrida, 1999, 74.

6 See Critchley, 1999; Cornell, 1992; Caputo, 1993 and 2000; and Bennington, 2000. For a critique of the ethic of deconstruction and an alternative view to this postmodern ethic, see also Bourgeois, 2001.

7 If, sometimes in this book, we relate Levinas to Derrida, this does not mean we ignore the differences between their projects. Rather, we do so based on their similarities or something they share. In this regard, we agree with what Critchley said about them: "[T]here exist certain thematic and strategic similarities between Derrida's and Levinas's thinking which allow both deconstruction to be understood as an ethical demand and ethics to be approached deconstructively" (Critchley, 1999, 12).

8 Lusthaus explained these models in more detail in his earlier paper on Zhuangzi's aporetic ethics. See Lusthaus, 2003.

Part I
ETHICAL DIMENSIONS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF NORMATIVE ETHICS IN ASIAN TRADITIONS

1
DISMANTLING NORMATIVITY IN INDIAN ETHICS—FROM VEDIC ALTARITY TO THE *GĪTĀ'S* ALTERITY*

Purushottama Bilimoria

This chapter begins with moral thinking in early India—the Vedic period—and the normative ethics that was developed then, in fledgling fashion, largely on the imperatives of a ritual cosmology and its aligned *rites* discourse. In due course of time, as perspectives changed, moral dilemmas and antinomies and irresoluble conflicts came to the surface—with other shifts occurring in the fabric of society. Vedic norms came increasingly into question, undermining the erstwhile normative structuration, confidence, violence, and power that this kind of formative moral plank—supposed to embody the originary and founding insights of Indian ethics and law—made possible or sanctioned. The chapter analyzes the rethinking and deconstruction of this transcendental framework during the classical period—when the Epics and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* emerged with a stronger social and self-reflexive conscience. The legacy of this period and the texts/textuality therefrom have left a large gap in the more *logocentrically* gounded Indian ethics—with which philosophers, jurists, ethicists, and political thinkers are still grappling.

I In the beginning…without beginning

I begin with the oft-cited platitude that the early Indian people—perhaps like human beings everywhere in their practical moral judgments—placed on the side of the "good" such values as happiness, health, survival, progeny, pleasure, calmness, friendship, knowledge, and truth. On the side of the "bad" were, more or less, their opposites or disvalues: misery or suffering, sickness and injury, death, barrenness, pain, anger, enmity, ignorance or error, and untruth. These positive and negative qualities are universalized, in principle at least, for all sentient beings, for it was felt that the highest good is possible when the whole world (gods included) can enjoy the good things that the cosmos has to offer. The *summum bonum,* however, expresses itself in the total harmony or homology of the cosmic and natural order characterized as *ṛta:* this highest good is the telos, the creative purpose and motivation that underpins human behavior. The prescribed pattern of social and moral order is thus conceived as a correlate—the perfect correspondence of the natural order. This is the totality of the ordered course of things, and therefore speaks, linguistically, i.e. in speech *(vācya),* to the truth of being or reality *(sat)* and hence underwrites the "Law" (or the "natural law"), transcendentally (*Ṛg Veda* I.123.9;

IV.51.5; V.8; X.300.1.2). The preeminent authority for this ontology that grounds the concomitant ethics is the Vedas. Their contents are simply “seen” or “heard” *(śruti);* the “revealed” speech is authorless, for “in the beginning there was neither being *(sat)* nor non-being *(asat),*” and yet “*Vāc* (Speech) the first-born of Truth *(satya)* spoke forth.” (Here, it is to be noted, the usual Judeo-Christian idea of a God to whom the source of the scriptures is owed is lacking or absent.[1]) Conversely, the principles inscribed in the Vedas are embodied in the gods (the polymorphic pantheon of deities, immortal benign spirits or angelic beings, demonic counterparts as remnants of the first failed sacrifices) who serve as models and exemplary icons for human conduct. But the gods themselves are not in any deep ontological sense the “Other” either, for they are considered, via one preeminent hermeneutic reading of the chants or invocatory hymns *(mantras),* as emergently effervescent light-beings of pure mantric-effect. The quasi-divine beings, not lacking in consciousness or intentionality, but not necessarily representing transcendental conscience (a Heideggerean requirement) either, are therefore predisposed to being internalized or rendered as superintending agencies who will by dint of the operative autonomous law safeguard, for a deferred delivery, the *apūrva* or the efficacious traces of the rites of sacrifice performed on the *altar-ity* of fire as decreed. The authority then rests centrally with the texts or the linguistic *“auctor”* with an episteme that recedes into immemorial traditions of the hoary past (or of no-time, perhaps).

How far, though, this trope of “authority” unpacks in real moral terms, and impacts on the social lives of people, are issues that cannot be taken up fully in this short treatment, but are taken up in forthcoming work entitled *Indian Ethics, Classical and Contemporary* (Ashgate). Nevertheless, there are certain larger schemata and their structural impacts that are picked up in later traditions—including Buddhist critiques of the Brāhmanical morality and its excesses—that we need to consider.

Here a particular principle of social ordering is adopted (probably introduced into India by the Aryans around 2000 BCE), according to which society is organized into a fourfold (but originally threefold) functional division or “class” scheme, called *varṇa* (literally, “colour” or “category.”). These are, with their respective preserves, namely, *brāhmaṇa* (brahmin), for religious and educational tasks; *kṣatriya,* for sovereign and defence tasks; *vaiśya,* for agriculture and economic tasks; and *śūdra,* for menial tasks. (One is reminded here of Plato’s “stations-of-life” division.) Overall, the sources of power get distributed evenly at different places, and ideally differences in function need not entail differences in interests, rights, and privileges; but the outcome in practice shows otherwise. A system of sub-divisions or “castes’ *(jātī)* further proliferates in the class functions, gradually turning *varṇa* into a discriminatory, hereditary-based institution. In any event, the brahmins certainly enjoy the better end of the system and they wield enormous power. A life-affirming but rigidly casuistic morality develops. In Max Weber’s judgment, the Vedas “do not contain a rational ethic”—if such an ethic did exist anywhere that far back (Weber, 1958, 261, 337)!

Vedic authority becomes normative in the later periods also; the Vedas are invoked as the source of ethics. To be noted is one other important institution, where three morally significant concepts emerge, namely, *āśrama,* dharma, and karma (or karman), culminating in the ethical concept of *puruṣārthas*—kingdom of ends—all of which are central to classical Hindu ethics. But before giving an overview of these concepts, one further point awaits mentioning.

In this Vedic ethical system one's actions are consistent with that which promotes the good so perceived, and one should desist from doing that which promotes or stimulates the bad so that the *ṛta* is not unduly disturbed. An act is therefore right if it conforms to this general principle, and an act is wrong if it contravenes it (and so is *anṛta*, or disorder) (*Ṛg Veda* X.87.11; X.125.5). Since to do what is right safeguards the good of all qua *ṛta* (the factual/descriptive order), it is assumed that it is more or less obligatory to do or perform the right acts (the "ought" or moral/prescriptive order). This convergence of the cosmic and the moral orders is universally commended in due course in the all-embracing appellation of *dharma* (from its earlier sense of "religious ordinances and fixed principles") (*Ṛg Veda* IV.53.3; VII.89.5).

The "right" or rightness is simply identified with "rite": it is formalized, taking in varying contexts (i.e. the obligation that is derived from a value, say, survival of the race, becomes the *sui generic* value itself; e.g., sacrifice, regardless of what is offered in the act). Rite now comes to possess an intrinsic moral worth and it becomes the defining *normative* frame of just about every moral value valorized.

Thereafter rite tends to assume, as it were, an imperious power all of its own, and people forget the original motivation or rationale underlying the imperative. Herein lies the originary violence in this ethical tradition, for laws are taken advantage of by the nobles *(āryas)*, who form themselves into an elite and dictate the terms of priestly and ritual performatives. It loses its heteronymous imperative. Rites become increasingly pursued by individual wills for egoistic ends, optatively, and are adjudged in respect of their utility.

One group claims knowledge and therefore privilege over others in accordance with the (prescribed) rites, their correct performance, utility, and so on. This leads to the establishment of differential duties and moral codes for the elite and major groups or "classes" in society. Each "class" constitutes a needful functional unit in the larger complex. The stages or lifecycles an individual goes through may entail distinct or differently arranged moral rules, roles, and goals or values for the group or sub-group he or she belongs to. Likewise for kings and rulers, with added responsibilities and privileges. *Differentia* are superimposed on the organic unity of nature. A kind of oblique distributive justice is assumed, and in time the question of moral *choice* is categorically left out: one either does it or one does not, and enjoys the rewards or suffers the consequences thereof. Herein lie the rudiments of the idea of karma, which we develop later.

What counts as *ethics*, then, is largely the normative preoccupations; the justification is usually that this is the "divine" ordering of things (in the sense of locating the order in some transcendental plenum or law, depicted in the imageless and, later, iconic gods, not necessarily in an absolute or supremely existent being, as God). This is akin to the ancient, especially the Stoics', conception of Natural Law in the Western tradition. This may also provide a basis for belief in the absoluteness of the moral law from which the rules and norms are supposed to have been derived. But virtually no attempt is made, until perhaps much later, or elsewhere in the broad tradition, at self-reflexively analyzing the logic of the ethical concepts and reasoning used. Indeed, questions such as: "What do we *mean* when we say of an action that it is morally right (or morally wrong)?" can hardly be said to have attracted the kind of critical attention afforded in (meta-)ethical thinking in recent times.

That is not to say, however, that genuine issues, concerns, and paradoxes of ethical relevance are not raised, even if they are couched in religious, mystical, or mythological ideas or terms. To give an illustration: Scriptures proscribe injury to creatures and meat-eating, but a priest would wrong the gods if he did not partake of the remains of a certain ritual animal sacrifice. With the gods wronged, *ṛta* can not be maintained: what then should he do (Kane, 1968–9, vol. I.i, 1–3)? It also follows that meat-eating is not unambiguously decried in the Scriptures, as more recent studies have attempted to show. However, that qualification or thinking over paradoxical scenarios merely is not sufficient by itself, for exceptions do not constitute the weight and strength of much of the moral norms that govern the daily lives and affairs of the people. Despite the persistence of the ritualistic *Weltanschauung,* texts from across the counter-traditions (*śramaṇa*), such as the Jaina and the more deconstructive Buddhist, are evocative of certain more humanistic virtues and ethical ideals, such as being truthful *(satya),* giving *(dāna),* restraint *(dama),* austerities *(tapas),* affection and gratitude, fidelity, forgiveness, non-thieving, non-cheating, giving others their just desert (justice), avoiding injury or *hiṃsā* to all creatures, and being responsive to the guest/ stranger. As the gods of the Veda,[2] who portray these ideals, recede from people's consciousness, they are encouraged to take more responsibility upon themselves, and transform these ideals into virtues, habits, and dispositions, with corresponding moral "objects" in the world. Old ethical problems achieve new meaning. Thus the question of whether the princely god Indra should slay the obstructive demon Vṛtra becomes a question for the king: should he vanquish the ascetics who stand in the way of his sovereignty (O'Flaherty, 1985, 177–99, 192)?

What we have presented here is, admittedly, a sweeping account that essentially covers the very early period (*c.* 1800–800 BCE) during which time the Brāhmanical tradition grew and flourished, but not without its own deeper uncertainties. The Vedic bards had deep insights into and knowledge of moral and spiritual goods *qua the desirable goods;* however, they were largely at sea as to what the procedural rules for just distribution and a social order without the encumbrances of a hieratic structure that embeds iniquitous arrangements would be like. They had some, albeit inarticulate and ill-defined inkling of this grounding vision. Nevertheless, the picture just sketched provides a general framework within which we can continue to see how moral consciousness, certain ethical concepts, and various, albeit conflicting, moral schemes are questioned, developed further, and articulated in later periods, which may collectively be identified as the "Hindu" tradition. (For this account we shall have to use more Sanskrit terms, as their exact English equivalents, and the converse, are wanting.)

II Historicization of the moral

In time, this faith in the "divinely" or transcendentally prescribed normative framework came under considerable scrutiny. Indian thinkers in the classical period, like their counterparts elsewhere, recognized morality's pervasiveness throughout human life and culture, and the need for stability in this area; however, they did not shy away from enquiry into the foundations of morality, the meaning of "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "bad." Reflecting upon the meanings or applications of these judgments has been

their way of putting theory, if *theory* it is, into practice. This is also a meta-ethical concern, but with a difference. In much of Indian philosophy, one does not witness moral thinkers starting with discursive, critical theory, or theoretical reflection on first principles, axiomatic propositions, intuition, emotive judgments, and so on. Rather they begin with the practices that are embedded or grounded in all human cognitive and, perhaps, aesthetic efforts. Over time these practices may come to be embodied in a tradition, in comprehensive doctrines, or articulated in texts foreshadowed by, and prefiguring, other texts. Initially the adherents seem not to be too disposed toward asking questions about their own beginnings—historical or conceptual[3]—but they are nevertheless aware of the heterogeneity of their rules, principles, practices, and the challenges presented in the moral dilemmas, antinomies, ethical quiddities, vagueness, and uncertainties threatening to destabilize the very grounds and presuppositions of their moral belief. Hence the subsequent hermeneutic and critical exegesis and deconstruction of these practices via texts yield variant interpretations, alternative models of ethics, and also departures in protocols or laws in the sense of practical wisdom (akin to Aristotle's *phrönesis*), as we shall see occur down through the history of Indian ethics as we progress through this chapter.

In the latter case, detached thinking about morality—as in science and logic—seems to be less important than *living* precariously by the rules and principles one believes in, or which are part of the community's repertoire into which an individual has been born, educated, and raised. One does not live by *theory* alone, if one lives by theory at all. Spinoza reminded the West of its first "calling" to ethics in this regard, and his method was not one dictated by science but by the human imaginary of natural reason and the full range of human interests, desires, feelings, and passions. More recently, Levinas has argued for the primacy of ethics over ontology (as ontotheology) and metaphysics, where ethics is defined as a concrete response to—*the face of*—the other. As Diane Moira Duncan (2001, 26) put it: "Ethics begins when one becomes accused (that is, called into question) by the singular and exceptional appearance of the face (a particular *face*) as the *enigma among phenomena*."[4] And deconstruction underpins the ethics of *alterity*. There is indeed evidence that something of this "interruption" and shift had begun to occur within the corpus—or in some part thereof—of the Vedas themselves. The Vedas are not as homogeneous as the Orientalists in the nineteenth century and their mimics in the twentieth century had assumed. If certain norms are not questioned and extended to embrace elements of *différance* to at least contend with the heteronymous will and with the heterogeneity of the surrounding culture that stare their composers in their face, some indeed are. There is thus some space for variation, or at least a variant self-understanding, that permits the Vedic sensibility to turn its gaze as it were from the heavens or the gods to the human fellow closer in their personal and social space.

Laurie Patton picks out one such insight and articulates this, drawing on the Levinasian vocabulary of *alterity*. In her paper, "Stranger's fire: a Levinasian approach to Vedic ethics" (2006), Patton begins by briefly tracing the recent move away from the absolute and toward the contextual and situational in the study of Hindu ethics. Recent studies of the Veda have focused on the "other," but more exclusively on the non-Aryan other, rather than on the "other" who makes moral obligations on the self. She thus turns to read Vedic passages as Levinas has read the Talmud. She reviews the basics of the Vedic world in terms of the better-known *ārya/dāsa,* or noble/slave, *ārya/anārya*,

Aryan/non-Aryan dominance. More significantly, following Levinas, Patton goes on to look at Vedic ideas of "face" (*mukha* and related phrases) and the face that makes a claim upon one's attention, as well as "presence" and "being in the presence" of someone (*"prati,"* and related words). She ends by examining the notions of the moral obligations of the Vedic guest, or stranger *(atthi)* at the threshold. Patton is right: there is obviously complexity in the idea of the Vedic "other"; while the Vedic attitude expresses the kind of "annihilation" of the other that we see in the Aryan/non-Aryan discourse, it also contains the very basic understanding that strangers can have a kind of infinite moral claim upon the Vedic self, and that this claim can structure certain ethical understandings in the Vedic world.

This act of being present to the guest, or stranger, is also connected with the idea of the "gift" *(dāna),* of giving; there is the "gifting" by way of sacrifice *(yajña)* to the gods, to the cosmos, to the "act of gift" itself (the non-transitive *gifting:* the sacrifice sacrificing itself in sacrifice in the primordial creation of the cosmos and gods also from non-existence). But the conceptual finesse of the idea of the "gift" *(dāna)* had to await a more thoroughgoing deconstruction of the dominant features of the normative Vedic framework that continued to privilege a certain class (caste) and its ordained agency ahead of all else and of the larger other (Heim, 2006). This articulation, although by no means its total rectification or reform, had to await the emergence of the medieval texts of the *Dharmaśāstras,* where a further connection is made between the act of giving, making the "gift," and the spontaneity of virtuous performance which is not mediated by some principle ("ought I or ought I not do this?").

III The dharma of ethics and the ethics of dharma

Now I wish to demonstrate how the gradual process of the deconstruction and reconstruction of the normative Vedic moral framework undermines the latter and heralds in new—even if not a patently radical—conception of the framing *Grund* or grounding framework of ethics. It occurs in this instance—or perhaps a better of showing it is—through three heteronymous ethical concepts that have never remained as absolute as the preeminent Vedic imperative norms had. And these concepts foreshadow the trajectory for all future and post-ethical thinking in Indian classical as much as in the contemporary milieu (just as "divine law", duty, utility, rights, alterity, vagueness, virtue, etc. have tended to become in Western/modern ethical thinking). These concepts are the ubiquitous dharma, karma, *puruṣārtha,* and their relative *topoi* or place and *ousia* in the discourse of *freedom* *(mokṣa).* We start with dharma.

"Dharma," it is to be noted, is an all-embracing concept and is perhaps unique to Indian thought. But the term is also rather diffuse as it has many and varying meanings, ranging from "ordinance, usage, duty, right, justice, morality, virtue, religion, good works, function or characteristics" to "norm," "righteousness," "truth" and "law," beside much else (Kane, 1968–9, vol. I.i, 1–3).

The word is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ,* meaning to form, uphold, support, maintain, sustain, to hold together. It certainly connotes the idea of that which maintains, gives order and cohesion to any given reality, and ultimately to nature, society, and the individual. As will be noticed, dharma takes over from the organic unity trope enshrined

in *ṛta* and shifts more towards the human and earthly dimension. In this respect it parallels Hegel's idea of *Sittlichkeit* (the actual ethical order that regulates the conduct of the individual, family, civil life, and state) more than it does Kant's ideal conception of the Moral Law, which is more individualistic, legalistic, and absolutist, and could even be said to place value on self-regarding over the other.

Law writers such as Kauṭilya and Manu bring the notion of dharma even more down to earth by devising a comprehensive system of social and moral regulations for each of the different groups, sub-groups (caste, rulers, etc.) within the Hindu social system, as well as specifying certain universal duties encumbent on all. Vocational niches, duties, norms, and even punishments are differently arranged for different groups, and the roles and requirements also vary in the different *āśrama* stages for the different groups. Thus, while a wife of a "twice-born" (the three higher classes) may take part in a Vedic rite, a *śūdra* would be risking punishment if he so much as hears the Vedas recited—to say nothing of those who fall outside the caste structure *(caṇḍalas)*, and other aliens (*Manusmṛti*, II.16, 67; X.127).

More often than not, though, dharma is invoked as though it were an utterly objective possibility, but there is no theory of moral realism that would cover over the perspectivism of the heteronymous. In fact, it merely gives an overall form to a system of positive law and regulations of individuals and of groups, the specific contents of which are determined by various different factors, among which the voice of tradition, convention or custom, and the conscience of the learned, might be predominant. Dharma then provides a frame that, as it were, could flick through different pictures of what is ethically proper or desirable at any one time. What gives coherence to the conception itself is perhaps its coveted appeal to the need to preserve the organic unity of being, to "make" justice where fairness is due, and to minimize the burden of karma, if not also to free the individual from its encumbrances. But what do we understand by the term karma, which is even rather popular nowadays outside India? It is important to consider this concept next as here the burden of heteronymity weighs even more onerously on the dead-weight of the traditional normativity, for in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* especially it serves to ground a damning critique of faith in the pure and simple causal efficacy of prescribed rites: the moral ramifications of any action—be it a conduct, thought, or a rite—are not exempt from the autonomous law of karma.

The basic idea behind karma is that every conscious act (cognitive, speech, etc.) and volitional action (physical, psychical, etc.) an individual engages in generates causal conditions for more than the immediately visible effect, such that the net effect, N, of an action X may manifest itself at a later time t_1, or perhaps its traces *(vāsanas)* get distributed over time t_2. Action X may combine the residual effects of action Y to generate a compounded, or even a reduced, effect in some future moment. And this in turn becomes a critical determinant of another action, Z, or a state of affairs pertaining to that particular individual (perhaps even a collective). The effect of Z might be pleasurable *(sukha)* or it might be painful and induce suffering *(duḥkha)*, but this is the *retribution* entailed in the causal network that is itself an inexorable manifestation of dharma.

This linkage of dharma and karma has the following consequences: there are no "accidents of birth" determining social inequities; mobility within one lifetime is however not rigidly excluded; one has one's dharma, both as endowment and as a social role. One either accumulates an improvement in karma aiming towards a better life, here

and hereafter, or one tries to sunder the Gordian knot and opt to step off once and for all from the circus of cyclic existence or samsara, as this condition is known in Indian religious thought. But this is not achieved as simply as it is willed. Indeed, this freedom is placed as the fourth and the most difficult of goals in the fourfold, categorical ends or *puruṣārthas,* literally, "the ends sought by human beings," and that too not without fulfillment of each of the preceding ends. Again, while this axiology is a reconstruction from the Dharmaśāstra period, in intent it also serves to destabilize the monolithic Vedic preoccupation with sacrifice as an external act within certain prescribed and confined performatives.

Puruṣārtha inscribes the idea that there are four avenues or goals as the "kingdom of ends" of volitional pursuits in life which are of intrinsic value, namely: *artha*, material interests; *kāma*, pleasure and affective fulfillment; dharma, again, social and individual duties; and *mokṣa,* liberation or gradual detachment from the cares of the three preceding goals of life. They may or may not be continuous with each other, though one goal might prove to be of instrumental value for achieving another, as is often thought of dharma in connection with *mokṣa.* But *mokṣa*—liberation—is *a fortiori* the plenum of *freedom* without which dharma as morality—along with the "ethical ends" of *artha* and *kāma*—is all but baseless, or mere means, i.e. utility, to some instrumentally conceived end. Still, an ascending scale might well be admitted; and the determination of the relative status of each category could lead to the next; but *mokṣa* as freedom in this sense is a presupposition, the *pre-theoretic* possibility, more than an "end" in the cumulative sense, as is often thought. This contention, however, is the subject of much vigorous debate in Indian philosophy.

What is significant is that the above conception of human ends provides a distinct backdrop for the detailed working out of the rules, conduct, and guidelines in respect of the institutions of *varṇa* (caste) and *āśrama* (life cycles), inasmuch as any individual will want to strive towards achieving the best in terms of these ends within the limits of his or her temperament, circumstances, status, and so on. Sometimes it is a question of balance; at other times it is a question of which interests or preferences take priority over which. For example, a twice-born in the third stage might consider that he has discharged his social obligations (dharma), so that his remaining interest (even challenge) is to edge towards liberation, by becoming a fulltime ascetic. As to what he should do and what he should not do in pursuit of this end, this is left entirely to his own determination, for which he relies on his meditative and cognitive insights. His dharma is the correlate of his innate constitution, of which he alone is the master: thus an inward-attentive praxis is the source of the principles for his ethic. Here, it may be observed, the gap between intuition and ethics is very nearly closed over. This is another salient feature of Indian ethics.

Mokṣa, construed as absolute inner freedom, appears to be the only natural right one has any claim to, for it is an *a priori* or transcendental right; but again it is not achieved without prior fulfillment of duties and obligations implied in the preceding stages of the life-cycle. These may comprise obligations towards offspring and kin as well as the performance of obligatory rites prescribed in the dharma manuals, in terms of what is owed (or in old English "*ought*") to them for their contributions towards the continuing welfare of human beings, indeed *the other*. In addition, one has the obligation of making gifts *(dāna)* and offering libations *(homa).* Duties and obligations, in this cosmic

perspective, are what make the world go round. What is significant here is the recognition of the presence of the other and the heteronymous responsibilities this entails. The ends, especially *artha, kāma,* and dharma, have a distributive—rather than a threatening or coercively retributive—impulse: one engages in commerce with the other, within defined rules; one partakes of pleasure in the company or union of the other, and one's duties are intentionally in relation to the other (one may have to consider oneself as an-other as well, and be mindful therefore of the duties towards oneself or the ramifications of its neglect in regard to the other).

The king, too, has certain obligations toward the other, namely, to protect the citizens and their interests and to do right by them. Whether the law-makers who laid down these particular regal obligations had in their mind the correlative "rights" of citizens (as distinct from their interests) remains a matter of interpretation. For, if dharma sets the limits and constraints on the action of citizens and kings alike, then one cannot say that obligations are entailed by the corresponding rights of others. And reciprocally, certain rights are granted to the citizens in order to protect the people against the king's Machiavellian tyranny.

One may nevertheless ask, how is it that the brahmin continued to claim or appropriate certain rights with respect to the performance of rituals? In consonance with Vedic teachings, rituals had to be performed in certain prescribed ways for them to be binding and effective. But this is a procedural requirement, i.e. the claim is that whoever is qualified should perform this according to the rules. It is therefore an impersonal entitlement, although later texts, as we saw, fixed the brahmin as the most qualified agent for the task. And this entitlement soon becomes a matter of inheritance. For the law-makers like Kauṭilya and Manu, the *varṇas* (vocational groupings or "castes") are arranged in a descending order and it is this scale that determines the claimable entitlements, privileges, and obligations, as well as punishments and violations, encumbent upon each member of the group.

IV The *Bhagavad-Gītā's* interruption

The strong positive and exclusivist rights, however, that were reserved for the upper caste under this arrangement, are severely undermined as we move further into the epic period where the *Mahābhārata,*[5] especially, and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (*Gītā,* for short, and *BG* for textual reference), which is one of its major books, reigns in a damning critique of not only the normative caste order but also the moral imperatives of rites and sacrifices that had as yet not been unseated—even through the Dharmaśāstra period. The central core-legend of this encyclopedic all-purpose collection is the family feud, culminating in a battle on the plains of Kurukṣetra (near Hāstinapura, north of present-day Delhi) between the Kāuravas (led by Duryodhana and Bhīṣma), and the Pāṇḍavas (led by Yudhiṣṭhira, the rival heir-apparent, and Arjuna).

Every attempt to resolve the conflict and to avert the battle had dismally failed. It was not as though all the parties involved had unanimously agreed to go to war; throughout the episode there was a great deal of resistance, and anxieties were expressed about the consequences of war, for in war there are no victors and much carnage is brought about,

and those for whom the war is waged usually get slain or wounded anyway. This "mystique force of law" *qua* dharma is born of an epistemic violence as in *jusnaturalism* (the tradition following the radicialization of the founding Grecoid "rule of law" *Gewalt, droit,* in Judeo-Christian theology (Derrida, 1990)). Dharma in the Epic even has a personal incarnation: in Prince Yudhiṣṭhira, the head of the Pāṇḍava brothers who are on the verge of a battle with their half-brothers, the Kāuravas, who claim to being the true heirs of their clan's fiefdom. If the king of Dharma-incarnate succeeds in the battle, despite the portentous sacrifices entailed, then a renewed era of social harmony could be reined in, a new order of dharma. Intriguingly, the symbol of "sacrifice" here is transposed from the erstwhile Vedic ritual act to the context of war as a way of extirpating/deconstructing a declining moral order (adharma), and replenishing it with a new social order. In Madeleine Biardeau's reading, as Julian Woods translates this for us, the dispute over the throne is the culmination of a social malaise originating in the progressive breakdown of the traditional functional relationship between the two upper (and dominant) caste groups, the brahmins and *kṣatriyas,* the two pillars of epic society (Woods, 2001, 10). This amounts to a progressive reversal of the natural order of things down the generation. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* underscores the disputation and the pending collapse of the moral order in the form of a dialogue on the eve of the battle, the "great sacrifice" (which is another way in which, following Biardeau, the *Mahābhārata* has been read).[6]

The multivalent nature of the *Gītā* makes it difficult, however, to reduce its core thesis to a simple proposition. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a decisive reexamination and trans-evaluation of the preceding tradition from the perspective of its less stable (conceptual and social) concerns. The Brāhmanical tradition that hitherto had a strong hold over life and its organizational aspects (the moral order of things) in India for many centuries had increasingly come under question, if not under direct attack, from all sorts of adverse or heterodox tendencies within and outside Indian society. Asceticism, yoga, renunciation of social life-forms, and various kinds of esoteric practices had begun to emerge, and these posed challenges to the Brāhmanical orthodox system. Buddhism and Jainism created conditions, in large part, for these tendencies to emerge and flourish.

There were already internal tensions also, for ritualism and the promises it made (i.e. that sacrificial performance that results in obtaining spiritual and material favors from the gods) led to disenchantment of one sort or another, particularly on the part of those who were, by virtue of their caste status, deprived of the privilege of performing sacrifices or having them performed for them. The ascetic orders among the brahmins were late in developing (closer to the Christian era) and even then the orthodox of the orthodox, represented by the Mīmāṃsā, or school of ritual exegetes (hermeneutics), held out against the movement. Some of the orders were atheistic (like the Mīmāṃsā itself), or at least decidedly non-theistic (like the Buddhist and Jain heterodoxy).

The institution of renunciation (*saṃnyāsa,* or self-banishment in ascetic reclusivity), based on the rejection of the social order and the affirmation of a more individualistic life-form, further undermines the orthodox Brāhmanic hegemony of the normative. Yoga served better the purpose of ascetic renunciation than the ritualistic orthodoxy, although the philosophical Upanishads, with their metaphysical *logocentricism,* had already absorbed much of the spiritual elements of yoga (meditation, contemplation, *askesis,*

asceticism, or self-abnegation). However, the Upanishads could not reconcile themselves with the prevailing popular religious practices, such as worship *(puja)* of the myriad of iconic and mythological gods or even God outside the Vedic ritual-sacrificial context (even if only symbolically—given that the Vedic gods were uniconic and did not themselves appeal to the popular mythological imaginary as happened later, in the Purāṇic (medieval) and post-epic traditions (particularly in the imagery of Rāma, Krishna, the monkey-god Hanumān, and so on)). The Upanishads further could not tolerate involvement in all kinds of activities despite caste and class structures. Various sects adopted differing practices and principles, and these caused further embarrassment to the orthodoxy. But there emerged deeper structural disquiet and questioning, and also interpolations of Vedic values. More significantly, the exclusion of the other entailed in the monism and detached morality of the Upanishads surfaces in the epic ethics; this s taken to a new epistemological and a-theologic critique, in particular, in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

The post-Vedic tradition had vexed equivocation over the imperative to act and to abandon action altogether in consonance with the emerging culture of yoga, with its proclivity towards *saṃnyāsa* (renunciation) and asceticism *(qua śramaṇa)*. When one sacrifices, one performs a certain act; however, in the actual "gifting" of elements (requisite ingredients) into the sacrificial pit aimed towards the heavens or the gods, one is also *abandoning* one's claim and invested interest in the material accoutrements devoured as it were by the etheric emergence of the mantra-evoked god or gods. However, which of the two moments counts as the *true* act of sacrifice? If, to turn to an example much discussed in postmodern literature, death is a "gift," then surely the giving up of one's attachment to life and living (perhaps for the other/the Other/Infinity) counts as the true act of sacrifice here, not the actual physical or clinical act of dying. Later exegetical tradition derived too rigid a nuance from the signifier of *yajña* (sacrifice), rendering it simply as the act of "giving up," or abandoning, which may well result also in non-action (as when we say "I have sacrificed my work for some needed rest"). The term that might have been more specific and appropriate for the actual gesture of abandoning, renouncing, the ingredients from one's hands into the altar, namely, *tyāga*, came in the deconstructive Indian epic-ethics to signify abandonment, or rather more technically renunciation *(saṃnyāsa)* of all involvement in action. This hermeneutical shift is all but complete by the time of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

However, Arjuna is perplexed over a statement made by Krishna, the speaking Avatāra in the epic, that seems to exhort both the Vedic injunction to act (*kuru* karma) and to abandon action (*tyāga* karma). Which one does he *really* favor, and which of the two is truly beneficial? As would be expected, Krishna is clearly in favor of karma—even though he tags the suffix "yoga" to it, hence *karmayoga*—in contradiction to *karmasaṃnyāsa*, which itself is to be abandoned, or put under *epoché* (*BG* 2.39). As Woods notes:

> This change of emphasis has to do with the reversal of Upaniṣadic values brought about by the *bhakti* [devotional movements] attempt to extend the prospect of salvation to all (including women)… The action advocated by Kṛṣṇa is no longer undertaken for the satisfaction of personal desires but for the welfare of the world and for "the benefit of all beings" (*BG* 3.5–5.25).
>
> (Woods, 2001, 71)

Woods articulates further this poignant reversal of the Vedic egological amorality in this fine paragraph which is worth quoting for its succinctness:

> In contrast to the traditional ritual goals of progeny, prosperity, heaven, etc., the practice of *karmayoga* is extended to any action undertaken in a spirit of nonattachment to the results (VI.24/*BG* 2.47–48). What must be sponsored in the sacrifice *(yajña)* is not personal gain, but the ecological cooperation of the gods *(devas)* responsible for the administration and good order of the cycle of life (VI.25/*BG* 3.16). What is taken from the natural environment must be returned. Only a thief enjoys the gifts of the gods (that is, the bounties of nature) without offering anything in return (VI.25/ *BG* 3.12), and the person concerned only with his own sense pleasures lives in vain (VI.25/*BG* 3.16).
>
> (Woods, 2001, 71–2)

Hence an ethics of pragmatism is conjoined with the necessity of alterity in the larger order of things; the idea of acting in a mode of *gifting* (marked in the non-concern with the fruits thereof) is extended beyond—or even against—Vedic rituals, and the more rigidly circumscribed caste duties as well as the yoga-Upanishadic *saṃnyāsa* (renunciation) in the epic culture: one performs one's duty encumbent upon one's stage in life as well as of course one's caste, though mitigated by one's conscience, and in the end out of respect for dharma (that is the new law), i.e., duty for dharma's sake.

Another move that underscores the recognition of the other in a more enigmatic way in the new paradigm shift being witnessed here is in the strong emphasis being given to *bhakti* or devotion that has compassion and empathy built into it rather than simply the sentiment of worship. The shift is as much an ethico-metaphysical one as it is religious, for as with the innovative move we see with Levinas towards the ideality of the *Infinite*—without necessarily a concomitant commitment to a personal God or the God of the philosophers—here too, there is a move away from the polymorphic instrumentalized personal deities to a more absently present transcendent *qua Totality* of all there is and is to be *(Being, Sat)*. It is in and by virtue of this plenum of the "Other" that it becomes possible to see and face up to the suffering of the other, i.e. all *beings*. And all gifts, giving and sacrificing indeed—as *tyāga*—come first to the Infinite and from there are distributed as is just and by a law divinely given to all beings in the measure of their respective needs and desert. Krishna, who symbolizes this as the Avātāric manifestation of the transcendent—first syllable among syllables, the carer among carers, Time among

time—discloses as in a phantasmagorical theophanic *aletheia* to Arjuna the magnificent unitary cosmos that is hewn together by Time and all its vagaries: birth, death, decay, being and nothingness, seasons, food, cyclic existence and the reemergence of the physical universe. And he reassuringly comforts a bedazzled Arjuna: *But I am your friend too, do not be frightened*. The Infinite as "friend" is a very grounding posture indeed. So he reiterates: "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give in self-abnegation *(askesis),* whatever *tapas (ascetic praxis)* you perform, O son of Kuntī, do this as an offering to me" (*BG* 9.1). In one single trope, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* here combines the reformed spirit of sacrifice, renunciation, and gifting in an act of "doing" (karma) devotion *(bhakti)* to the Other, but the Other that is not the dualistic *Auctor* (authority), bifurcated from the world, but rather—here integrating both the Upanishadic and Buddhist meta-ontology—the totality of all the others, of all beings and non-beings, self and non-self. It is this single-minded pursuit in the new ethics of dharma that leads one to liberation. The antecedent Vedic morality, as with the remnants of the sacrificial offerings in the altarity of ego, is here transformed into a sacrifice that returns one to the face of the other, the other as oneself, and not as the other. Dharma then inscribes within its still limited and socially bound configurations ethics as philosophy's first port of call.

To recapitulate, the encoding of the discourse of entitlements in respect of the fruits of religion—such as heaven, *mokṣa*, Hari (Vishnu as the Lord), Brahman, etc.—had been challenged earlier by Buddhist and Jain thinkers, decrying the Brāhmanical proclivity towards ritualistic and sacrificial action, while they themselves continued to place strong emphasis on the necessity of carrying out one's duty and responsibilities in all spheres of life. This *śrāmaṇic* critique of the Vedic ideology was to have a powerful influence on the *smṛti* (the "recollected" tradition), wherein the seeds of the internal subversion of the Brāhmanic discourse are planted. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* embodies perhaps the strongest such critique and it also in its own way problematizes the self-righteous *Rāmāyāṇa* and much of *Mahābhārata* ethos (where the tensions between tradition and social reality are underscored but not adequately resolved).

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* first seeks to consolidate the myriad of petty rewards and fruits promised in the Vedic rites into a single end (here following the Upanishads and Sāṃkhya), namely, of spiritual freedom; but it realizes soon that this will not work, at least not in practical ethics and within the braces of the ethical conceptions that inscribe dharma, karma, and *puruṣārthas* (and a further concept it introduces, namely, *adhikāra*, "entitlement," "right"—which we will discuss shortly). So on the orthopraxy side the *Bhagavad-Gītā* takes over the philosophical Mīmāṃsā's groundwork of dharma—namely, the juridical reading of *dharma* concretely as law, that had also informed the *Dharmaśāstras*—and reconciles this with the practice of yoga and the emergent *bhakti* or devotion. This is reflected in Krishna's exhortation toward a "single-minded motivational purpose" (*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha*, *BG* 2.41). Thus, for the *Bhagavad-Gītā,* as for the Mīmāṃsā, the rightful discharge of dharma entails the performance of certain duties; but these duties need not be seen in any absolute sense as in the rite-based prerogative. The categorical imperative or the stricter reading of Vedic injunctions as mandatory that we find underwritten in the Mīmāṃsā exegesis is considerably weakened in the *Bhagavad-Gītā's* discourse of *niṣkāma* karma, or disinterested action, for such a class of voluntary actions is still of a type intended variously to purify the mind

(sattvaśuddhi), to please the gods *(īśvaraprīti),* and, most importantly, to contribute to the welfare of all beings *(lokasaṃgraha).* In other words, the context is one of deconstruction of the orthopraxy and a decisive move towards the enigma of alterity. This *enigma* takes two forms or has two "faces," that of the human and that of the Infinite as well, as we have described earlier, bringing in the strong context of *bhakti* or devotion. These heteronymous actions are not on a par with prescriptive rites of the Vedic acts, but they stem from one's own *svadharma,* or the self's involvement in all modes of welfare, one's own and others'.

Now the notion of *svadharma,* which in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* receives a gallant endorsement, on the face of it might appear to be somewhat akin to Kant's notion of moral autonomy. However, the *Bhagavad-Gītā's* notion, while it forms the basis of moral action, is not an abstract consequence that results from its critical method, but is a quasi-subjective category referring to the innate characteristics of the individual, which she has according to her nature, here termed *svabhāva* (self-nature).

In a sense the above combines both a formal and a material function. *Svadharma* tells one that one ought to do what one ought to do with regard to whatever is true to one's nature *(svabhāva);* and this is formal, as Krishna pronounces: "Better one's duty (though) imperfect, than another's well-performed" (*BG* 3.35). But the content of this duty with regard to what is one's nature is promptly specified by the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in terms, not of the psychological properties of the individual but, rather, of the empirically determined social placement or status of the individual. In other words, *svadharma* is ascertained by reference to the normative rules of that society, and that may be, as is certainly the case here, the particular class division and its encumbent duties and obligations. Hence one's *svadharma* is determined within the web of the dharma-karma dynamic, that is to say, the prescribed role in the interrelated network known as dharma. And one does this without regard to consequences or rewards, that is to say, in a spirit of detachment by renouncing the fruits of the action. Surely again, the Kantian maxim, "duty for duty's sake" rings true here as well, but the difference is precisely in the way in which these duties are determined and legitimated. (Kant, in the final analysis, resorts to utilitarian considerations, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to a transcendental *telos;* in fact, it would be better restated, again, as "duty for dharma's sake.")

The *Gītā,* however, is not bound simply to the discourse of duties, for the idea of *adhikāra* (entitlement or intentional agency) had already opened up other possibilities and claims that might run counter to the "rites ethic" it attempts to rescue, albeit in a broader context of socially beneficial action. In this regard the *Gītā* presents an interesting variance on the nuance attached to *adhikāra* in its own rather deceptive and delicate use of the term. I do not wish the treatment that follows on *adhikāra* to be seen as a preoccupation with the apparent cognate notion of "rights" (in the modern Western sense), but rather for its use in the Indian context to undermine traditional grounding of norms on a very determined and deterministic founding where the heteronymous will was subjected more to the whims (and/or approval) of the gods than on the freedom-presupposed self-nature of the individual agent. And this I do by focusing on a very important verse in the *Gītā* (2.47): *karmaṇyevādhikāraraste mā phaleṣu kadācana,* which we believe is best read as: "You have entitlement indeed to actions, never though to the *results* (fruits or expected rewards)." There is a shift from the need to perform and carry out actions as a matter of "law" to the intentionality in the motivation toward such

an action, or non-action, which is matter of conscience. Arjuna here is being told that since he (Arjuna) belongs to the warrior group, his *adhikāra* is to the act (which a warrior performs), and he has no claim on the results that may or may not follow. He is further told, by implication, that he has no entitlement *not* to do the act that has to be done; that is to say, he has no right to desist from what is (by his self-nature) encumbent upon him as a *kṣatriya* or member of the warrior caste.

While it may appear that the *Gītā* is confusing the locution of duties with that of rights (understood as entitlements, let us concede), the move is deliberate, because the author(s) here is attempting to introduce the idea of "negative entitlements," which effectively states that no one, including oneself, can rightfully interfere with what is one's due or desert by virtue of the law (of *dharma*). Thus, if action Z is one's due, then so be it; this is one's entitlement and nothing should be permitted to erode its fulfillment. By shifting the focus from results or fruits to action, the weight of the entitlement is also shown to fall rather on the side of action than on the side of the fruit. The *Gītā* problematizes the direction in which the latter leads to antinomies rather than a contribution to dharma. That is to say, one's motivation to act in the interest of desired consequences can lead to conflicts between *desire* and the purpose or end to be fulfilled in undertaking the act. Thus if one's incentive to work or research is basically to collect the pay-check at the end of each fortnight, then this is not really fulfilling the call of duty in respect of the larger interest, goals, and incentives to make a contribution to the field and to knowledge.

The *Gītā* is far from explicit in defending dharma, for dharma's sake, or at least it does wish to respect the autonomy of the individual and uphold the discourse of freedom *(mokṣa)* above that of unmitigated duty. And so it attacks the persistent ritualistic and ascetic discourse for its own deconstructive ends. And the *Gītā* also wants to disabuse people of the false idea that they have any entitlement to the fruits of action anyway—which is the reason for asking Arjuna to renounce the fruits *(phala-tyāga)* and not the other way round. This notion of *tyāga* is not directly borrowed, as generally said, from the *saṃnyāsin* (renouncer) tradition, but in a qualified sense from the philosophical Mīmāṃsā, which stressed the giving up of (or abandoning from one's own hand) the *dravya* or substances (such as *soma*) used in the sacrifice. The alternative discourse of renunciation which the *Gītā* wants to legitimate would gain greater strength from the locution of *adhikāra* which the Mīmāṃsā had got going than it would through any borrowings from the *saṃnyāsa* direction. But scholars and commentators, especially of the *Vedanta-bhakti* scholastic ilk, have concentrated far too exclusively on *tyāga* (which does not appear in this verse) rather than on *adhikāra*. Still, one can see that the metaphysical instability of much of the Vedic normative framework becomes tropes for deconstruction and erasure in the *Gītā;* and thus the circumspection began in the *Dharmaśāstras* is continued in a deeper, more philosophical and self-critical way. Without such a self-reflexive process a tradition simply cannot move forward in its ethical advancement.

We would venture to suggest that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* came very close to opening up the earlier notion of *adhikāra* towards a notion of *rights* (for whatever it is worth) in the Brāhmanical context (for it certainly stretches the erstwhile concept of entitlements beyond the scope intended in earlier texts). It draws its guiding impetus from Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics (or *nyāya*) and seeks to apply it beyond the framework of sacrificial and

religious rites to the broader context of social dharma (and in war scenarios also). But beyond this it could not go, for good historical reasons. The *Gītā* would have to accept the fundamental idea that all persons are born equal and that nature does not endow differential markings on the individual which immediately translate into social differentiations. It does, though, concede another kind of *adhikāra* to all people (one presumes) in the art of *bhakti* or devotion, for Krishna promises to pay heed to whomsoever comes to him with a flower, a leaf, water, and a mind fixed on him alone, etc. But this overture towards a more universal *adhikāra* is constrained in the social context by the overbearing weight of *varṇāśramadharma* ("caste" structure) and an orthodoxy that could barely face reconciling itself with the challenges of the incipient individualism inherent in the systems of yoga-asceticism and Buddhism (through its denial of the caste structure if not of *ātman* also). Thus the response of the *Gītā* is restrained and calculated; it merely suggests the possibility of a discourse of universal human rights *(mānava-sarvādhikāra)* but does not develop it.

It is on the basis of the heteronymous freedom of will recognized and underscored in the *Gītā* that the later *bhakti* sants (bards or "saints"), especially Kabīr, Raī Dās and Tukarām, Guru Nānak (the founder of Sikhism), Mīrābāī, and Narshi Mehta appealed to some notion of universality on the issue of the eligibility to devotional practice. This more humanistic strain helped to cut across caste and gender barriers and overcome the prejudices or prerogatives of the "twice-born." Just as for the Buddha a brāhmaṇa (brahmin) is one who is noble by disposition rather than by birth, for the medieval *sants* anyone who gives herself to Hari (the Lord) has the *adhikāra* to devotion and will undoubtedly find Him (Kabīr, 1951, 41–2). Kabīr added further momentum to this universality by proclaiming that (i) the real *sanctum sanctorum* is not in the enclosure of the temple, or by the Gaṅgā (the Ganges River), or in Dvāraka (Krishna's legendary home), as most pandits would have people believe, but it is in the heart *(hṛdaya)* of each individual, and (ii) there is no difference between the *Īśvara* (Godhead) of the Hindu and *Allāh* of the Muslim. By implication and in principle the Muslim has as much *adhikāra* as the brahmin has, and vice versa.

This is the juncture where Gandhi's social philosophy made its pivotal contribution. His immense sensitivity to the disadvantaged, the minorities, the "untouchables" (in the surviving caste ordering, in which he included and extended his support to the African American struggle in North America as well), and to women, would not have been possible had the traditional normative framework not been interrupted and the ethically significant circle expanded. Gandhi relied heavily on the *Gītā* to extend his political strategies to those excluded from the hegemonic order. And for this he almost forged an alternative reading of the text, shifting it out of the historical and warfare genre to one of allegorical and intensely moral teachings (Jordens, 1986, 89–90; cf. Woods, 2001, 9–10). Dharma to him no longer sufficed as the arid concept of the ritualistic and legalistic normative that privileged one class or caste over another, but rather a social praxis in which an individual exercised and cultivated certain virtuous dispositions in relation precisely to the other.

Just as Levinas drew his inspiration from Martin Buber's "I-Thou" ethico-theology, Gandhi also found Buber's other-regarding teachings to be exemplary and a corrective to modernity's fetish with strident individualism (Dalton, 1993, 228).[7] While in his early reading of the *Gītā*, Gandhi thought warfare to be consistent with the dharma normative

inasmuch as a warrior must follow through his caste duties in an act of selfless own-dharma *(svadharma),* later on he shifted his position to give preeminence to the principle of nonviolence *(ahiṃsā)* as a key derivation from the now more transcendentalized understanding of dharma. Dharma is not just about rites, privileges, duties, laws, prohibitions (hence exclusions), but has the heteronymous character of both preparing the grounds through praxis of positive virtues (observances, vows, non-injury, *satyāgraha* or truth-making, and self-regulative restraints) and enabling a more empathic and compassionate and empowering disposition towards the other. The latter inexorably led him to articulate a discourse of rights reciprocal to duties: hence "the brown men's rights over the colonial masters' exclusivistic privileges," and the rights of all citizens as equal to each other. Gandhi inspired and unleashed a whole nationalist movement and struggle for India's—and of much of the colonized world's—freedom from Europe's "raw othering"[8] of the non-European based on the seemingly simple teachings of the *Gītā* on dharma. He shifted the paradigm from the scholastic-dogmatic normativity of bygone centuries to a more (already) post-Enlightenment recognition of the broader moral responsibility that subjects have towards the other *qua subjects*. And here one is ready at hand with a "gift" of oneself in face of the other, and not as a means to some further individualistic or corporate or communal ends (in the sense of divisive community identity politics).

Here the project of injecting sensitivity to the ethic of "alterity" in modern Indian philosophy comes full circle—from Vedic *dāna* (the "gift of sacrifice") to *adhikāra,* which finds its way into the Indian Constitution as well under the section on the Fundamental [Bill of Human/Moral] Rights; but the project has only just begun: the modern Indian intelligentsia, its agents in the media, and much of neo-colonialism's secularized middle-class beneficiaries, alas, have deferred or foreclosed this challenge in deference to the creation of a "Hindutva" state first and foremost, based on medieval proclivity towards the normative, at the exclusion as much of theory as of the "other"—be that the Muslim, or women, or the disadvantaged from the "lower" rungs of caste and ranks in the politics of caste. There is, however, reason to feel hopeful—as long as hard deconstructive *thinking* on ethics goes on, in India, in modern Indian law, in Indian and comparative philosophy, and in the minds of people with some power and position in the global context.

Notes

* This chapter is dedicated to conversations between Renuka Shama and William Edeglass, and myself somewhat on the margins. I wish to express gratitude to Professor Youru Wang and Chris John Zvokel for assisting with the final editing.

1 For further discussion and a hermeneutic-linguistic basis of the philosophical thesis underpinning the claim, see Bilimoria, 1998, 315–19.

2 Some vague anticipations are inscribed in the modular of the gods—but perhaps too early for human beings—in the *Ṛg Veda* II.28.11; V.85.5; X.10.4; X.113.4; X.117. Cf. Kane, 1986–9, vol. I, i, 4.

3 See Mohanty, 1995, 8.

4 Duncan, here, is drawing from Levinas in his "Enigma and Phenomena"; see Levinas, 1996, 65ff.

5 The *Mahābhārata,* itself a monumental epic work, comprising some 100,000 stanzas, is said to be the longest single poem produced in human history (in that respect compares with Homer's *The Iliad* and *Ulysses*). As the paramount epic in the tradition, it includes a vast number of legends, accounts of cosmogony (beginnings of the universe), theogony, mystico-religious and philosophical speculations, as well as tracts on law, jurisprudence, and the duties of the warrior caste (*kṣatriya*) *vis-à-vis* other castes groups, and principally the royal-kingly caste. The text is usually taken to indicate the greater narrative of the episodes of the Bhāratas (a legendary patriarch of what could have been ancient India). The composition and compilation of the epic probably began around the sixth or seventh century BCE and was completed around 200 BCE, in which period the the *Bhagavad-Gītā* seems to have been introduced. Although the authorship is attributed to Vyāsa, a legendary figure (like Manu), it is believed that the work is a result of several hands, with various interpolations and redactions and parallel recensions evolving in subsequent periods. The translations for the *Bhagavad-Gītā* verses cited in this chapter, whether by Sargeant, Woods, or the author, are all based on the Critical Edition issued from the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute as *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited,* 1933–66.

6 See Woods, 2001, 10, 71, 73.

7 Martin Buber and J.L.Magnes, *Two Letters to Gandhi,* April 1939, cited in Dalton, 1993, 228. See also Gandhi's exchanges with other Jews, which Dalton discusses on pp. 134–8.

8 Kant specifically refers to the native peoples in various parts of the world who have not as yet been embraced by or entered or evolved into the Enlightenment's Reason, as the "raw man": they presumably eat "raw," and think in the "raw." See Bilimoria, 2002.

2
DECONSTRUCTION, APORIA AND JUSTICE IN NĀGĀRJUNA'S EMPTY ETHICS

Douglas L.Berger

Nāgārjuna (*c.* 150–200 CE), the Andhra-born and Nālandā-trained giant of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, is not often consulted for his ideas on ethics or liberating Buddhist practice, despite the fact that three works considered reliably attributable to him, the Bodhisambāraka, *Suhṛlekha,* and *Ratnāvalī*, are entirely concerned with these. Much more common in contemporary scholarship are commentaries that parse his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and *Vigrahavyāvartani* for their anti-metaphysical and anti-epistemological arguments. Nonetheless, *kārikās* 8, 17 and 24 of Nāgārjuna's main work on Buddhist philosophy, the *Mūlamadyamakakārikā* (hereafter *MMK*) can conceivably be understood as a kind of mini-treatise on the "proper" Buddhist way to think about efficacious virtuous conduct. In these chapters, Nāgārjuna resists various versions of a Buddhist moral dualism between good and bad actions in favor of an admittedly metaphorical explanation of karma that draws a powerful parallelism between "common law" *(vyavahāra)* and karmic "debt" *(ṛṇa)*. The claims that are laid out in this mini-treatise are in fact profoundly ethically provocative in the light of contemporary debates in deconstruction on aporia or the impossibility of justice as the deconstructability of law *(droit)* as well as the relation between justice and the economy of the "gift" *(cadeau)*. Indeed, because he is attempting to valorize the bedrock Buddhist notion of *pratītyasamutpāda,* "co-arising" or "co-completion," Nāgārjuna's logic of action, though it is certainly deconstructive in its impetus *vis-à-vis* other Buddhist views of moral adjudication and achievement, nonetheless offers a counter-discourse to Derridean deconstruction, as it rejects the oppositional tensions between law and justice or giver and recipient in favor of a visualization of action that places the "paramount aim" *(paramārtha)* of human freedom (nirvana) wholly within the transactional chains of the functioning community. In the Derridean model of ethics, justice can only be pursued through an overcoming, through a confrontation with the limits of the present law or with the compulsions of debt created through reciprocity. With Nāgārjuna, one can only realize freedom through the very workings of the social economy itself; there are no limits to transcend in working out one's karmic condition because, as he puts it, "there is no distinction of bondage from freedom; there is no distinction of freedom from bondage. The limit of freedom is but the limit of bondage; between them not even the subtlest thing is recognized."[1] For Nāgārjuna, ethics and justice are not "inventional," as Derrida's conception has been labeled; they do not deconstruct social law so that actions more proximal to justice may be carried through, but are rather co-produced as the direct

consequences of acts that are inimical to them within the unfolding of life and the transactions of community.[2]

There is, to be sure, a distinctly liberating ring to Derrida's conception of justice, as it continually demands that we acknowledge the other *(l'autre)* and strive after the "impossible" call and unexpected "arrival" of coming justice. This ring is, due to the ever-critical stance of deconstruction, audible only through opposition to present injustice, through battle with the tyranny of the present state of hegemonic capitalist and liberal democratic power, which self-righteously employs in its service the "monster of the law."[3] In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida assails Francis Fukayama's defense of the ideals of liberal democracy, the most fundamental of these ideals being equality before the law, in light of the manifest "empirical" shortcomings of the iniquitous wielding of Western power. Derrida's "ten-point telegram" of indictments against the legacies and consequences of contemporary Western dominance includes the economic burdens the present system of international free-market capitalism foists upon the world's poor, the dissemination of weapons and the wars they enable, drug cartels and the current Western thematization of international law.[4] Apart from the fact that international law is, despite its claims to equality, monopolized by but a few powerful nation-states, its more immediate flaw is that it "cannot be dissociated from certain European philosophical concepts, and notably from a concept of State or national sovereignty whose genealogical closure is more and more evident, not only in a theoretico-juridical or speculative fashion, but concretely, practically, and practically quotidian."[5] Laws are crafted both on the international stage and within nations attempting to control ethnic and political minorities to safeguard the interests of those in power, who often define themselves "homophilically," that is as "genetic brothers" or as a "fraternity of friends" as opposed to the "other" as threat or enemy.[6] "The other," for the dominant discourse of liberal democratic society and the traditional ethical philosophies that buttress it, is not an obligation to be submitted to, but a danger to be resisted. Nonetheless, beyond these overtly political objections to the unjust purview and iniquitous enforcement of law in the post-Cold War world, there are deeper "structural" oppositions between law and justice that go to the very heart of deconstruction, and which involve on the one hand the *aporia* of justice as well as, on the other, its "messianic" promise.[7]

The problems of what we normally conceive to be ethics, responsibility or justice reveal themselves on a number of interrelated levels, those for instance of friendship, of goodness and on the political level, but always in the context of whether or not there is really anything ethically intelligible about the assumption of so-called "equality." With regard to friendship, for example, while it is talked of as loyalty and devotion to the "other" as friend, its quality is often judged on the basis of the quality of the partner's reciprocity and usefulness to oneself, which establishes "equity" among friends. But Derrida questions what the real ethical value of such an "equity" could possibly be if it demands that the virtue of the other be a precondition for my own commitment as a friend.[8] The "give and take" of relationships, according to the "logic" or "economy of the gift" *(cadeau),* also demands, according to any existing "conscience" or "science of ethics," whether it be conceived under the name of virtue, deontological or utilitarian ethics, a systematic rule or condition of virtue that we both give with generosity and receive with gratitude, so that our relationships are perpetuated and stabilized through feeding on the cycle of care of others and indebtedness to others. However, Derrida

warns, this introduces a crucial problem into the whole phenomenon of gift-giving, beneficience, generosity, because when a gift serves as a mere "bill of exchange," as it were, an investment in the economy of relational reciprocity, it ceases to be a gift as such, a gift in the most genuine sense of something offered purely for the offering, donation *(le don)*. "For one might say that a gift that could be recognized as such in the light of day, a gift destined for recognition, would immediately annul itself."[9] These charges of course go staight to the center of that most cherished assumption of liberal democracy, the assumption of "equality before the law," which conceives justice as the supposedly universalizable and calculable application of law to all citizen/subjects. Derrida reminds us that "Nietzschean geneology" has already uncovered the actual functioning intention behind such a socio-political prioritization of "equality," namely that of "the equivalence of right and vengence, of justice as principle of equivalence (right) and the law of eye for eye, an equivalence between the just, the equitable *(gerecht)*, and the revenged *(gerächt)*."[10] What is so often self-righteously invoked as a moral principle of protection for "the people" unmasks itself as the power of the state to inflict punishment in exchange for disloyalty.

All of these conceptions of justice as "reciprocity" and "calculable equity" that we have inscribed and encoded within our law harbor within them manifest injustice, for they miss the "singularity" of relationships which is opened by the "other," or which opens one to the other in a manner that confers upon the other not "equality" but priority. As Derrida puts it:" 'Good friendship' supposes disproportion. It demands a certain rupture in reciprocity or equality…'Good friendship' is born of disproportion: when you esteem or respect *(achtet)* the other more than yourself."[11] In like manner, the "gift," if it is to be a true "gift" *(le don)*, must be given as it were "in secret," hidden from the recipient so as not to evoke a sense of indebtedness from the recipient, and hidden from the giver too so as not to tempt the expectations of recognition and return in the giver. "On what condition," Derrida asks, "does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forget itself, that the movement be a movement of the gift that renounces itself, hence a movement of infinite love."[12] Love can achieve infinity, even between finite beings, when goodness, rather than demanding loyalty as the price of beneficence, offers itself to the other through the cancellation of "debt-consciousness," which is to say, "ethics" heretofore conceived. Responsibility as a meaningful act of intention is only exhibited by a giver who not only does not require a response, but who will not respond when asked why he offers his gift, in the manner of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in the biblical narrative.

The demands of "infinite love" and "infinite gift" that the singularities, the unique and concrete events of our lives, enjoin upon us on behalf of the other also inspire that spirit of Marxism that deconstruction continues to embrace. That deconstructive spirit of Marxism Derrida invokes should continue to "haunt" Europe and the "New World Order" with the calls for social and global justice. Were we to treat goodness as a "transcendental objective," a duty that would lend itself to formulaic fulfillment, we would forfeit the actual call of social justice that always tugs at us through the singular other before our eyes, with this forfeit making available to us only a counterfeit "good conscience." The openness to the other and their future, precisely because it resists closure or fulfillment, is "undeconstructable," and is the "messianic" element in Marxism. "In the waiting or calling for what we have nicknamed here without knowing the messianic: the coming of

the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant as justice*… remains an *ineffaceable* mark…of Marx's legacy."[13]

Of course, all this drives a wedge, an ethically necessary and enabling one, between law and justice, ethics and goodness, responsibility and alterity, a wedge that Derrida not only acknowledges as presenting us with several facets of aporia, but also as preserving the "messianic" character, a universal, "undeconstructable" of justice. For one thing, while my ethical duty conventionally conceived makes "responsibility" incumbent on me an answerability for my deeds and a conscious knowledge of what I am doing, the goodness of truly giving in a relationship requires that I maintain a "secrecy," a hiding from myself of my giving in order to preserve it as giving, making "irresponsibility" just as necessary for me as responsibility.[14] Second, and certainly most poignantly, the calls to selfless and pure giving to the other that each singular event, each particular other, make to me render it impossible for me to see to justice for everyone. I must be selective, exclusive, and hence iniquitous, in my duties to others.[15] But these painful and dreadful aporias of friendship, generosity, justice, and politics are thrown upon so as to be preserved, for what is preserved with them is the hope of the *arrivant,* the unexpected coming of the other, the call of justice itself.

There is, beyond these issues, one of the fundamental aporias of justice, namely that while it demands a suspension of closure, an ever-vigilant and critical openness to the other and the other's future, the urgency of present circumstances also requires decision, a decision that would enforce a closure on matters at hand. That moment of decision that every event throws upon me preserves this mutually enabling tension between justice and law. Here is where the "other hand," as Critchley puts it, the genuinely deconstructive maneuver of Derridean thought, comes in.[16] "Determination," "closure," "ethical choices" have been rendered hopelessly problematic through a first-hit deconstructive critique of the role they actually play in traditional moral thought. But on the other hand, once the call to justice as gift, openness to the other, has through criticism rendered calculable decision-making intractably problematic, decisions must still be made in order for any justice to be done. But such decisions interrupt the possibility of justice that made their very consideration possible. In turn, these decisions, determinations to act, and the new calculations and economies of moral exchange they set in motion provoke another iteration of the tension between the indeterminate "perhaps" and the moral exigencies of decision. This is what Derrida refers to as "the aporia that all things must face."[17] There is a mutuality of a sort then in Derrida's representation of the relationship between justice and law, but their mutually enabling interaction is energized, prompted, provoked by their aporetic tension. The demand for justice, the call of responsibility to the other, is fueled by this tension, for the possibility of justice will always be "beyond right, calculation and commerce," for "thinking the gift to the other as gift of that which one does not have and which thus, paradoxically, can only come back and belong to the other" lifts justice out of the economy of right, reciprocity and law.[18] Yet calculations are still to be made afresh, and laws are still to be made better. It is because justice and law are irreconcilable, because they cannot penetrate one another, that they provoke one another.

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā's* entire project for its own part seems to be to overturn the very notion that any sense of "opposition" or "tension" is in fact the mechanism for impelling human beings to the cause of justice. Obviously, given its composition in the

midst of a rapidly developing Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika Buddhist scholasticism, the terms of the moral opposition Nāgārjuna is trying to overturn are vastly different, and it is crucial that these varying terms be clarified.[19] This task is not easy, not merely because of the hermeneutic difficulties of contrasting the worldviews of a second-century Indian Buddhist and twentieth-century French philosopher, but because the term that most securely underpins the moral dualism Nāgārjuna attacks has itself been rather poorly translated and understood. That term is *svabhāva*.

The *MMK* has in English scholarship often been seen as an "anti-metaphysical" tract because of its unrelenting denial of *svabhāva*, with *svabhāva* translated most often as "self-nature" and "essence" in some vaguely "Western substantialist" vein.[20] There seem to be no good etymological or philosophical reasons for this, however. "Substance," from the Latin *substare* (to support or to be present) and "essence," from Latin *est*, which is a cognate term of the Greek *estí* and Saṃskṛta *as* (to be here) do not correspond to the verbal root of *bhāva*, *bhū*, which means primarily to "become" or "to be brought about."[21] The Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika Buddhist literature that makes *svabhāva* a widespread philosophical term discusses it in the context of how different states of being or entities are brought about, how they are conditioned and can be distinguished in a causal sense. Indeed, the larger context of the philosophical debate about *svabhāva* in early Buddhist scholasticism was intimately tied to questions regarding the general efficacy *(kāritra)* of changing phenomena *(bhāva)* upon one another given varying causal theories and portrayals of time.[22] Though much of the discourse regarding the "efficacy" of *svabhāva* is couched in either psychological, phenomenological, or atomistic terms in the Buddhist scholastic literature, its real import is moral, because ultimately early Buddhist philosophers invoked *svabhāva* in order to give viable explications of the mechanics of karma, or how our intentions and actions determine our quality of bondage to the world or liberation from attachment.

Buddhism starts with an accounting of how things come to be the way they are *(yathābhūthaṃ)*, or, more specifically, a causal-biographical account of how we as particularly unique individuals have come to assume the karmic state in which we presently find ourselves. With regard to ordinary entities, the Vaibhāṣikas argued that each particular thing we cognize must contain its own unique set of "self-replicating" characteristics, for if we are to assume that not all effects of our cognitions upon us, such as their memory or their karmic contribution to our consciousness, are immediate but are rather delayed, then some "solely self-replicating" *(sasvabhāvamātra)* features of entities must persist through all time dimensions, past, present, and future.[23] The Sarvāstivādins in their turn posited that certain elementary things in the world, that is to say, certain elements that are not compounded out of other elements *(asaṃskṛta* dharmas) must have their own "self-sustaining power" *(svabhāva)*, since the Sarvāstivādins account for the regularity and predictability of causal production based on the fact that certain capacities *(samārthya)*, conditions *(pratyaya)*, and powers *(śakti)* regularly bring about effects that correspond in kind to their precedents.[24] The upshot of all this metaphysical theorizing is that, for select events in our psychic encounter with the world, their constitution and causal efficacy, the manner in which they are brought about and continue to be brought about even within the framework of pervasive impermanence, belongs uniquely to their own self-production or self-sustenance *(svabhāva)*. This picture of the

world has palpable ethical relevance. On the soteriological plane, for both of these schools, samsara or the "world of rebirth" and nirvana or "freedom" are distinct ethical forms of life and so cannot be brought about by the same causes or behaviors; rather, each respective state of being is brought about by its own constituent behavioral causes or factors *(saṃtānāḥ)*. This principle of states of affairs that are brought about or produced only by states of affairs of distinctly like kinds applies then to both the physical and moral spheres in these scholastic treatments, for just as the molecules that constitute fire cannot quench the thirst produced in my body, and water does not have the chemical components that would allow it to burn down a building, so samsara is construed as a set of mutually reinforcing and facilitating behaviors that cannot quench the thirst *(tṛṣṇā)* of desire and nirvana consists of another set of mutually reinforcing and facilitating behaviors that cannot arouse attachment. This was, the early scholastic Buddhists believed, the most cogent way to interpret the bedrock Buddhist doctrine of "co-arising" *(pratītyasamutpāda)*, which was articulated in the earliest Buddhist sutras as a strictly causally conditional depiction of how attachment overcomes a person, and how that attachment itself can be behaviorally dissolved.[25]

Entities therefore do not "have" or "possess" or "exhibit" *svabhāva*, as many English translations of the Buddhist thought of this period so misleadingly present the concept. *Svabhāva* is rather verbal and causal; it means to "self-produce" or "self-create," or to "come about according to (one's) own principle." *Svabhāva* in both its metaphysical and ethical senses is much closer to "autonomy," where the latter means "to have one's own laws, principles or norms," to be a "being from and unto oneself." To translate *svabhāva* as autonomy or self-production would be especially fortunate when it is remembered that these terms can be considered synonymous with "independence," not to be conditioned or influenced by environing factors but to define and determine oneself. Sarvāstivāda philosophers indeed equate the capacity of a person to be autonomous with their ability to bring about virtuous conduct and attain perfect enlightenment.[26] What the notion of *svabhāva* does in the end, its performative function, is to fuel a fundamental moral opposition, to create a tension between forms of life that lead to bondage and forms of life that release one from it, to give us a standard of how to distinguish between acts of samsara or adharma (attachment or wrong) and acts of nirvana or dharma (freedom or righteousness). This tension between these two poles is what, according to the scholastic Buddhist movements that were gaining ascendancy in the monastic "universities" of Nāgārjuna's time, supposedly impels us to walk the path of virtue *(dharmapada)*.

The daring "deconstructive" drive of Nāgārjuna lies precisely in wanting to resolve this tension, to dissolve this opposition, to overturn this trenchant moral dualism between justice and injustice with the subversive notion of *śūnyatā* or "emptiness."[27] Like Derrida in our own era, Nāgārjuna was viewed by philosophical opponents in India with loyalties to both the Vedic and Buddhist camps as a philosopher of mere and thoroughgoing negativity. *Śūnyatā* earned for itself and its major Indian philosophical purveyor a very unsavory reputation. *"Śūnya,"* given the fact that its primary meaning in Saṇskṛta is the number "zero," was associated with connotations of negation, privation, and absence *(abhāva)*. Nāgārjuna was constantly branded a "closet nihilist" and was charged with being a "refutation-only" debater, as having "no philosophical thesis" upon which to build a positive program of life. Like Derrida, Nāgārjuna, despite these charges, has an affirmative agenda in mind, but that agenda at least overtly allies itself with an already

centuries-old program of Buddhist practice. However, because of its association with "co-arising" *(pratītyasamutpāda),* the notion of emptiness is actually solicited to dissolve moralisms of opposition between righteousness and unrighteousness in favor of a morality of the interdependence of the two that makes possible the transition of the latter into the former. If the Vaibhāṣika and Sarvāstivāda schools represent metaphysics of independent existence and autonomous functionings of samsaric and nirvanic activities that in the end bring into relief a sharp moral dualism, then the *MMK* constitutes in its entirety a rigorous deconstruction of autonomy and freedom conceived as detachment from influences in favor of a relational vision of interactional interdependence and mutual freedom. Confronting the Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika interpretation of Abhidharma metaphysical categories *(padārthas),* Nāgārjuna is especially adamant in his advocacy of relationality over autonomy in those chapters of the *MMK* concerned with the possibility of efficacious Buddhist praxis. And this vision of relational and mutual action, the organic whole that a person's deeds make up, the relatedness of the practicioner to social norms and through that relatedness the enhancement of her ability to transform them, is Nāgārjuna's idea of how righteousness is born.

Nāgārjuna attempts to accomplish this task with three maneuvers. First, he exchanges the mechanical depictions of karmic economy that represent action in terms of causal chains governed by morally dualistic productive forces for a metaphorical revisioning of action as debt *(ṛṇa)* and Buddhist practice *(bhāvanā)* as its repayment. Second, Nāgārjuna portrays Buddhist practice, the bringing about and carrying out of virtue, not as the scholastic Buddhists had, as the discipline of a reclusive community at a remove from common social activities *(saṃvṛti),* but rather as a mirror of the "orderly conduct" established by "common law" *(vyavahāra).* Finally, Nāgārjuna refuses to see right or justice (dharma) and wrong or injustice (adharma) as polar opposites in tension, in battle with one another, each vying as it were for the other's destruction, but rather as a genealogical co-production of right-and-wrong *(dharmādharma-samutpannam)* in which, apart from the performance of wrong, the right cannot come about. These maneuvers, it would seem, enable Nāgārjuna to avoid, to circumvent, an ethical aporia such as is encountered in Derrida's thought, since for Nāgārjuna, notions of "common law," "debt and repayment through practice" and the "co-production" of injustice and justice, while they do not serve as fixed, transcendental principles of moral judgment, provide nonetheless what he considers good examples, a faithful template, for how ultimate liberation from attachment is made possible.

Nāgārjuna begins the seventeenth *parīkṣā* of the *MMK* with the forthright announcement that he is actively attempting to articulate the theory that best represents the Buddha's teachings about virtue: "With a mind intent on self-restraint and benefiting others, the righteousness of companionship is that seed that comes to fruition in this life and the next."[28] This statement reiterates a basic Buddhist commitment to the karma theory in its moral dimensions. But in order to clarify his view of the genuine import of the karma theory, Nāgārjuna feels compelled to discard the two alternative scholastic treatments.[29] What these alternative theories in their own respective fashions are trying to provide is a transcendentally explanatory baseline, a fixed locus or standard upon which one can sensibly demarcate between meritorious and deleterious acts. Both of these views feed off what can palpably be characterized as a moral dualism, a dualism between

meritorious and impure seed-intentions in the first case and good and bad principles of conduct in the second.[30] Nāgārjuna travels down a different road that, in its own remarkably daring fashion, militates against the search for a fixed standard of adjudicating an act, or trades in the hoped-for fixed standard in exchange for a visualization of action that preserves its connection to common-sense notions of causality and the *sensus communis* of appropriate social conduct *(vyavahāra).* If the flaw of the instant theories was to attempt mechanical or transcendental descriptions of action that would allow us to rely on fixed standards for judging its merit or demerit, Nāgārjuna's articulation will employ a combination of a powerful metaphor with a concession to a certain degree of inexplicability.

Planted, perhaps appropriately enough, in the middle of these Vaibhāṣika and Sarvāstivāda architectonics of karma is Nāgārjuna's own trope, which he justifies on the authority of the Buddha, awakened teachers and the earliest Buddhist disciples.[31]

imāṃ punaḥ pravakṣyami kalpanāṃ yātra yojyate/
buddaiḥ pratyeka-buddhaiś ca śrāvakaiś cānuvarṇitaṃ//
pattraṃ yathā 'vipraṇāśas tathā-ṛṇaṃ iva karma ca/
caturvidho dhātutaḥ sa prakṛtyā 'vyākṛtaś ca saḥ//
prabhāṇto na praheyo bhāvanā-heya eva vā/
tasmād avipraṇāśena jāyate karmaṇāṃ phalaṃ//

(*MMK* 17, 13–15)

I will now proclaim the idea that is fitting here,
authorized by the Buddhas, *Pratyeka*-Buddhas and disciples.
Karma (action) is like a document or a debt that remains unexpired;
being of the four realms, its nature is inexpressible.
It is abandoned not through (mere) abandonment,
  but only through constant practice.
Therefore, through the unexpired arises the fruit of action.

Nāgārjuna, having set aside moral conceptions of action that try to capture its features through the language of psychic seeds, continuity or autonomy, chooses an entirely different metaphorical vocabulary to discuss it. Indeed, this Nāgārjunian move of exchanging theory of moral efficacy for moral practice in the *MMK* is of a piece with the project of the entire work. He writes in the stanzas above that the real material nature of action, how its mechanics actually function in the world, simply cannot be explained *(prakṛtyā 'vyākṛtaś ca saḥ).* The metaphorical terms he uses to speak of properly Buddhist ethics are that of a debt *(ṛṇa)* or a document witnessing to a debt *(pattra).* When one acts, one inscribes one's name, as it were, on the act in such a way as to acknowledge that the consequences of the act will remain in force, will not be cancelled *(avipraṇāśa)* until one makes good on the debt incurred. To act is to own one's act. But

this notion of act, insofar as it is comparable to a document witnessing to a debt, also preserves the interpersonal, social, and even environmental relation of action, for debts not only give the borrower an obligation to repay, but the debt is repaid to someone, to the community, to the world, and so Nāgārjuna says that the effects of an action belong to all the four realms *(caturvidho dhātuta)* of existence. Nāgārjuna, unlike Derrida, does not infer the consequence that a sense of reciprocal obligation somehow cheapens or diminishes the "purity" of an act, a perceived cheapening that led Derrida to characterize true beneficence as a true "gift." On the contrary, for Nāgārjuna, it is precisely because action can be thought of as "debt" either incurred or paid to others that the interpersonal bond, the commitment to the other, can be strengthened. This is especially evident in the fact that Nāgārjuna's "documented-debt" conception of *karma* takes into account what he found lacking in the Vaibhāṣika and Sarvāstivāda models, namely an explanation of how action can be abandoned *(prabhāṇa)*, or how karma is eliminated and one is released from rebirth. A debt cannot be resolved by merely ignoring it or adding nothing more to it, for the document that witnesses to the debt remains in force, and in like manner, actions (karma) cannot merely be eliminated if one does not repeat them or simply resolves that one has escaped their consequences. The debts that action incurs must be paid somehow. Nāgārjuna insists that, just as a debt has to be "worked off," the borrower has to do the work of acquiring the currency sufficient for another act of "paying off" the debt, so fruits of action are only "worked out" through "constant practice" *(bhāvanā-heya)*. Moral cultivation as self-transformation here is inextricably bound to obligation to the other, and so is the very possibility of freedom. To formulate this in all its apparent, but only apparent, paradoxicality, the hope for freedom is bound through a sense of indebtedness to the other, and can be gained only through the work of fulfilling one's obligations to the other.

There is, furthermore, another powerful social resonance in these verses about debt, for the resolution of debts was in traditional India part of "legal trade" or "transaction law" *(vyavahāra)*, as we are told in no small number of ancient legal and political texts of the period.[32] This needs looking at, for it unlocks an ever-elusive but indispensable key to Nāgārjuna's thought. *Vyavahāra* is often translated somewhat blandly as merely social "convention," "practical action," or "custom." This is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent senses of the term, but the "commerce" or "interaction" that *vyavahāra* connotes is more often than not of the "regulated" variety. The most widely disseminated scholarly rendering of *vyavahāra* in Nāgārjuna scholarship in English has much to do with Candrakīrti's commentary *Prasannapadā*, where he observes with reference to *MMK* 24, 8 that one of the possible meanings of *saṃvṛti* is "social convention, that is, the world of ordinary language *(loka-vyavahāra)* and of transactions *(saṃketo)* between individuals which is characterized by the distinction between knowing and the thing known, naming *(abhidāna)* and the thing named *(abhideya)*, and so on."[33] Candrakīrti most often boils down the notion of *vyavahāra* to the epistemological and linguistic conditions for the possibility of social interaction. The term however carries a palpable moral and even legal force in Saṇskṛta literature. The *Arthaśāstra* specifically and repeatedly identifies *vyavahāra* in terms of "legal transaction" and "legal trade."[34] In his version of the *Dharmasūtras*, Gautama lists a series of offenses ranging from abuse and assault to property transfer and economic issues as possible areas requring "legal action"

(vyavahāra).[35] This is what informs my translation of *vyavahāra* as "orderly conduct," for it has wrapped up within it moral, social, and legal implications. At least in one instance in his commentary on *MMK* 8, 6, Candrakīrti even points out the legal dimensions of *vyavahāra* as it pertains to regulated transactions when he clarifies it with the examples "farming, commerce and governing."[36] This meaning then sheds much-needed light on Nāgārjuna's own adamant insistence that the "paramount aim" of freedom could not be attained without reliance on the moral model of mutual obligations enjoined in socially constructed "orderly conduct" (*vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate/paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate//MMK* 24, 10; "Without relying on orderly conduct, the paramount aim is not taught; without comprehending the paramount aim, freedom (nirvana) is not understood"). Once again, in contrast to Derrida, Nāgārjuna has no reticence in making worldly law a model for righteousness, for it mandates the recognized obligations of people toward one another. Nāgārjuna does not bring up in this context any hint that such "common transactional law" may be in its present form in any way unjust, and were a Derridean counter-critique of Nāgārjuna to focus on any particular point, it may be precisely this one.[37] This lack of attention to the possible injustice of present common law does not of course exclude the possibility that certain laws may be unjust and need reform, for while Nāgārjuna does not criticize legal shortcomings, no demand is placed by him on the fixity of present law either. Worldly law serves nonetheless, being as it is a model of transactional obligation, as a model of justice, a model that is reflected and not rejected by the practices of Buddhism that strive for freely engaged righteousness.

The theme of "emptiness" and its relation to the four noble truths of Buddhist praxis is of course the topic of the much-discussed twenty-fourth *parīkṣā* of the *MMK*, and as such the chapter has been considered in recent scholarship the *locus classicus* of Nāgārjuna's deconstruction of metaphysics. However, in the context of the present topic, it should not be surprising to the reader who considers the *parīkṣā* closely that it is actually predominantly about practice and its intelligibility and possibility. Indeed, the first several verses of the chapter, addressing a *pūrva-pakṣa* or contrary view, represent Nāgārjuna as trading insults with an interlocutor who posits that the principle of emptiness *(śūnyatā)* would lead to the implication that, if all things were empty, so must be the person of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and any conception of particular beings who would attain enlightenment and freedom.[38] Such an assessment of Nāgārjuna's thought seems to have been the default one among Brāhminical and rival Buddhist systems. The most important verses of the chapter are devoted to nothing else but undermining this misconception, and in a way that follows from all Nāgārjuna has said so far in the treatise about action and its moral consequences.

svabhāvād yadi bhāvānāṃ sad-bhūvam anupaśyasi/
ahetu-pratyayān bhūvāṃs tvam evaṃ sati paśyasi//
kāryaṃ ca kāraṇaṃ caiva kartāraṃ karaṇaṃ kriyāṃ/
utpādaṃ ca nirodhaṃ ca phalaṃ ca pratibhādhase//
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe /
sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā//

apratīya-samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate/
yasmãt tasmãd aśũnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate//
yady aśūnyam idam sarvaṃ udayo nāsti na vyayaḥ/
caturṇām āryasatyāṇām abhāvas te prasajyate//

(*MMK* 24, 16–20)

If you perceive these phenomena as entities that are self-produced,
you will perceive these very phenomena as uncaused and unconditioned,
you will contradict the (notions of) cause, effect,
the very agent, instrument, act, arising, ceasing and fruit.
We proclaim that what is completed through co-arising, that is emptiness;
taking up this formulation is precisely the middle path.
Any particular thing that is not completed
through co-arising is not recognized,
for this reason, any particular thing that is not empty is not recognized.
If all this is not empty, there exists no arising nor extinction,
(and) this would imply the absence of the Four Noble Truths.[39]

Attaining the middle path *(madhyamā pratipat)* taught by the Buddha requires one to conceptualize or formulate in words *(prajñaptir)* the concept of co-arising *(pratītyasamutpāda)* as the "emptiness" *(śūnyatā)* of things. But what exactly does it mean for ethics to be "empty"? What sorts of conceptual implications does equating "co-arising" with "emptiness" have for ethics? In another characteristically radical move, Nāgārjuna ends up, in rejecting the Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika rhetoric of *svabhāva* that would make good and bad deeds the fruits of disconnected causal chains of action, insisting in a very concrete way that injustice and justice, impurity and purity, unrighteousness and righteousness, exist only in a co-productive relationship. A commitment to *svabhāva* would leave the unenlightened unable to liberate themselves and the enlightened unjustly removed from the suffering of the world that is their moral charge.

yaś cābuddaḥ svabhāvena sa bodhāya ghaṭann api/
na bodhisattva-caryāyāṃ bodhiṃte 'dhigamisyati//
na ca dharmam adharmaṃ vā kaścij jātu kariṣyati/
kim aśũnyasya kartavyaṃ svabhāvaḥ kriyate na hi//
vinā dhamam adharmaṃ ca phalaṃ hi tava vidyate/
dharmādharma-nimittaṃ ca phalaṃtava na vidyate//
dharmādharma-nimittaṃ vā yadi te vidyate phalaṃ/
dharmādharma-samutpannam aśūnyaṃ te kathaṃ phalaṃ//

sarva-saṃvyavahārāṃi ca laukikān pratibādhasse/
yat pratītyasamutpāda-śūnyatāṃ pratibādhasse//

(*MMK* 24, 32–6)

Whosoever is by nature unenlightened, if he pursues enlightenment,
he will not attain it even through bodhisattva practice;
nor would even a single person do either right or wrong;
how could the non-empty, much less the self-created, do anything?
To you, the fruit is acknowledged even without right and wrong,
though you would not acknowledge a fruit produced by right and wrong.
If you did acknowledge a fruit produced by right and wrong,
how could that fruit, co-arising from right and wrong, be non-empty?
You contradict all worldly orderly conduct
when you contradict the emptiness of completion through co-arising.

The first several verses above illustrate in a rather poignant and concrete way the consequences to people of propagating a theory of "self-produced" moral outcomes. Nāgārjuna draws the implication that, if actions have in the end their own autonomous characters or self-generated capacities, then a person who finds himself at the moment unawakened can have no hope at all of reaching enlightenment, for nirvana and the state in which he lives are such entirely different realms of conduct that effecting the change from one to the other is practically impossible. The same story could be told of a person who was fortunate enough to achieve enlightenment, for they, under the *svabhāva* explanation, could be tempted to think of themselves as always having carried the virtues of awakening within them, and so the fact that they are now so awakened could lead them to the conceit that enlightenment was no achievement at all, but rather an elite state of potential that they have lived out. Where, we find Nāgārjuna asking in these stanzas, is the morality in such a vision of practice? What kind of moral explanation of the world depicts it as constituted by one set of noble beings destined for awakening and another set of ignoble ones bound to suffering; is this not the very Brāhminical classism that Buddhism as a social phenomenon was trying to reform?[40] A properly moral theory, on the contrary, allows for the possibility of change, change in the person's behaviors, habits, and conduct, and the change to the world offered by practicing communities; indeed, a properly moral theory does more than allow for such change; it enjoins such change.

However, Nāgārjuna's case goes past even these limits. The moral claim being made in these verses is indeed radical from a conventional scholastic Buddhist point of view. If we assume actions are adjudicable by some fixed moral standard, if we can pronounce any given act as moral or immoral only within the framework of a systematic theoretical dualism between good and evil, Nāgārjuna asserts, we actually rob it of its moral worth, a moral worth that is once again "worked out" in the long run of praxis. For acts have extraordinarily complex genealogies that carry with them some incalculable measure of right-and-wrong *(dharmādharma),* a measure that is only created in the circumstance of

the act's production or co-arising *(nimitta, samutpanna)*. This entails of course that right-and-wrong *(dharmādharma),* being ever co-produced through action, are empty *(śūnya),* which means exactly that they do not exist in isolation from one another. But, the *MMK* warns, empty ethics is the only kind of ethics we can embrace, for ethical absolutism, which in the Buddhist context Nāgārjuna knew entails unmitigated distinctions between right and wrong acts, leads merely to a disassociation of right and wrong that is so great that it effectively leaves us powerless to understand how one may change into the other, and thus powerless to bridge the gap that such a moral absolutism ultimately creates between the interdependent world in which one lives and the freedom for which one strives. It is only through the actual performance of acts by agents interacting with the world and with other agents that fruits or moral consequences arise, and it is only through ongoing, unmitigated practice and discipline, practice and discipline that also inevitably involve others and one's environment, that freedom is possible. Freedom can, within the indistinguishably overlapping spheres of worldly orderly conduct *(laukika-vyavahāra)* and the community of practitioners *(saṃgha)*, only be acquired mutually, for, to cite this pivotal verse once more, as Nāgārjuna proclaims, "without relying on orderly conduct, the paramount aim is not taught; without comprehending the paramount aim, freedom (nirvana) is not understood."[41] The point is an extremely significant one to comprehend as Nāgārjuna intimates it, for in saying that ethical absolutism is flawed, he does not mean that calling one action "right" and the other "wrong" has either no meaning or an arbitrary meaning that only serves the ends of power sought after by the social elites, for Nāgārjuna has no demonstrable wish, as we saw above, to implicate customary social ethics or laws as they stand. Nor does he mean to reverse the meanings of "right" and "wrong" actions as these are commonly understood in the communally constructed life. The emptiness of ethics is not one that "re-evaluates" or reaches "beyond good and evil" in any way that violates known social practices, but is an ethics only insofar as it is of "good-and-evil." Empty ethics does not denote that ethics is meaningless, but rather that ethics is only meaningful insofar as it allows for the untrammeled interaction of right and wrong. Does that imply, an incredulous scholastic critic may be tempted to ask, that one somehow attains enlightenment rather than further bondage by performing evil deeds? It means, Nāgārjuna is responding, that without wrong action there will be no pain, with no pain there will be no understanding of pain, with no understanding of pain, there will be no remedy for it nor any facilitator of compassion, and with no remedy of pain or compassion there will be no virtue, and if there is no virtue there will accrue no merit, and were there no merit, we could call nothing good. Morality here is only freed to operate when it is liberated from any construal of dualistic tension.

What Nāgārjuna shares with Derrida then is a vision of justice that deconstructs, overturns, transcendental principles of conduct while retaining a steadfast commitment to the other, the suffering other who demands an affirmative, selfless duty from us. Derrida's indictment of the frequent shortcomings of any given system of civil law as it stands raises a challenge on which Nāgārjuna, without question, is in this treatise silent. The question that Nāgārjuna's particular handling of ethics brings before Derrida's thought, however, is whether the latter has, through his insistence on the irreconcilability of the artificially systematized law to the absolute demands of justice, the purity of the offered gift as opposed to the calculative reciprocity of the merely moral, the "universal structure of the messianic" over and above the economy of rights, created an aporia that

people actually do penetrate in their obligated commitments to one another in everyday life. Is it the case that Derrida, in his ethical demands of pure giving and absolute hospitality, expects too much from human beings? Or does Derrida, in his messianism of justice and disjointure of goodness, merely leave human beings with no better option but to expect? While making it incumbent on people to give, Derrida forthrightly admits that such giving is, in his special sense of the term, "impossible"; he asks of them a sacrifice so perfect that they themselves will have no consciousness that they are giving. Nāgārjuna's project seems for its part to point to the deduction that all moral dualisms can only lead to a kind of ethical paralysis that weakens one's ability to move from attachment to justice. Nāgārjuna's equation of samsara and nirvana lays aside any possible distinctions between purely pure and purely impure acts, and along with these any need to posit an aporetic character to human goodness. Nāgārjuna places good giving within relationships, where people have always experienced it, its examples being so abundantly plentiful in human social life that models of it do not have to be looked for in great prophets or awaited messiahs, but can be seen everywhere and practiced by everyone. If a "Derridean messianism" leaves us longing for the fulfillment of the prophecy, the promise of justice in our openness to the future, perhaps a "Nāgārjunian Buddhahood" reaches forth a boon-bestowing hand to help a society that prompted, in both unintended and intended ways, the vow that its beneficence makes good on from one eon to the next.

Notes

1 "*na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣanaṃ/ na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣanaṃ // nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsārasya ca/na tayor antaraṃ kiṃcit susūṣmam api vidyate//*" (*MMK* 25:19–20).

2 Caputo, 1997a, 136–8 enumerates three senses of what is described as Derrida's "inventionalism" in the face of ethical *aporias:* how justice must suspend present law in order to improve it; how a just decision must suspend formulaic legal judgment in order to establish the justice of "singular," individually unique cases; and the urgency and haste which the need for justice forces on decisions that at the same time require calculative deliberation.

3 See Cornell, 1992, 167.

4 Derrida, 1994, 81–4.

5 Ibid., 83.

6 Derrida has a fascinating discussion of these dimensions of political organization through an engagement with the texts of the political philosopher Carl Schmidt and the philologist Emile Benveniste in *Politics of Friendship* (1997a, 83–104).

7 Simon Critchley, 1999, 13–20 has emphasized in his reading of Derrida's critique of Levinas the "two-handed" approach of deconstruction, which both locates "ethics" in the problematic history of Western ontology and yet "displaces" the obligation to the other from that context where it can viably serve as the "condition of the possibility of the ethical."

8 Derrida, 1997a, 23.

9 Derrida, 1995b, 29.

10 Derrida, 1997a, 64.

11 Ibid., 62.

12 Derrida, 1995b, 50–51.

13 Derrida, 1994, 28.

14 Ibid., 27. Derrida discusses this problem at length in trying to explicate Abraham's seemingly supremely unethical secrecy to his family and to his own son about God's demand that he sacrifice Isaac (*ibid.*, 58–69).

15 This is elaborated by Derrida in moving language in both *The Gift of Death* (1995b, 68–9) and especially in its relation to "democratic societies" as "rules of the majority" in *Politics of Friendship* (1997a, 20–2).

16 Critchley, 1999, 18.

17 Derrida, 1997a, 67.

18 Derrida, 1995b, 27.

19 Robert Magliola has suggested that Nāgārjuna's notion of *śūnyatā* and Derrida's *différance* could be fruitfully seen as aligned (1984, 89). David Loy pushed this argument a step further, suggesting that Nāgārjuna, because his metaphysical critiques deconstructed both identity and difference, moved beyond Derrida's purely textual approach to criticism (1987, 59–80). Harold Coward, based on later revisionist suggestions from Loy, thought that Nāgārjuna and Derrida could perhaps be reconciled on the basis of the positive functioning of language for spiritual realization in the space of Zen dialogues (1990, 145–6). The late B.S. Yadav, though in the process of writing about Nāgārjuna never mentioned Derrida explicitly, had no apparent hesitation about seeing Nāgārjuna as engaged in a "methodic deconstruction" of various strands of Hindu and Buddhist "logocentrism" (1992, 132–3). The earlier comparisons struck me as much too superficial and in need of far more philosophical contextualization of both philosophers, while Yadav's appropriation of deconstructive language in order to represent Nāgārjuna's thought, as I have written elsewhere, eloquent and evocative as it certainly was and even with all its obvious promise to enhance and deepen future scholarship in this area, seemed to beg the comparative question rather than resolve it.

20 The three major translations of the text into English concur on this rendering. Inada has it as alternatively "self-nature, self-existence, self-essence, own-being" (1970, 184). Kalupahana translates *svabhāva* as "self-nature" and its adjectival form *svabāhavato* as "substantially" (1986, 32–4; 36). Jay Garfield, who depends on the Tibetan, *rang bzhin*, gives *svabhāva* with some qualification as "essence" (1995, 89). The peculiarly Western metaphysical biases of the translations themselves, as Andrew Tuck (1990) has so effectively demonstrated, have tended to reflect the assumptions of transcendentalism, analytic philosophy or deconstruction, depending on whatever philosophical movement happened to be in vogue in the West. The most important departure from this in recent writings has been the work of John Schroeder, who effectively points out that the real targets of the *MMK* are the various hermeneutics of Abhidharma (2000, 559–72). In Schroeder's depiction, Nāgārjuna's aim is to thematize a more faithfully Buddhist view of specifically meditative practice. While I wholeheartedly concur with Schroeder's corrected emphasis, it seems to me that Nāgārjuna's frequent invocation of the Four Noble Truths as a whole, which encompass not only meditation but conduct as well, implies that his conception of practice is much more broadly ethical in its interests.

21 Halbfass notes this difference between these two verbal forms in Saṃskṛta, but does not think it of too much import with regard to their common general sense of "being" (1992, 22). In certain philosophical contexts such as the Buddhist, however, I think the difference is significant.

22 See Frauwallner, 1995, 185–208.

23 A detailed exposition as well as Sautrāntika critique of these views is found in Vasabandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāsya* (see V.25c–27), as is referenced in Burton, 1999, 113 and in Williams, 1981, 227–57.

24 Saṇghabhadra, a younger contemporary and opponent of Vasabandhu, has the definitive philosophical treatment of the Sarvāstivāda explanation of these processes in his *Nyāyānusāra* (see the reconstruction of verses 46: a–b in Cox, 1999, 695–701).

25 "*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti imassa uppādā idaṃ uppajjati/ imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhatti//*" ("That existing, this comes to be; that arising, this is born; that not existing, this does not come to be, that ceasing, this perishes"; from the *Majjima-nikāya* I: 262ff, quoted in Kalupahana, 1992, 56, but my English translation).

26 In his monumental *Nyāyānusāra,* Saṇghabhadra introduces the treatise by reminding his readers that the whole point of Abhidharma analysis is to explicate the difference between "contaminated" and "uncontaminated" dharmas in order to attain enlightenment (verses 2–6) and after a brief introductory overview of the aggregates of personality and consciousness, proclaims that only those beings that have the capacity to self-produce *(svabhāva)* are ultimately real *(paramārthasatya),* while those that do not exhibit *svabhāva* are only nominally real *(prajñaptisatya)* (verse 15); see the reconstruction in Cox, 1999, 651, 655. It is of course one of the main aims of Nāgārjuna to turn this assessment on its head.

27 Despite the widespread classical Indian view of Nāgārjuna as a "refutation-only" *(vada-vaitaṇḍika)* debater (see Matilal, 1998, 51–6) and the current Western penchant to see him as a thoroughgoing "deconstructionist of ontology" (see Martin, 1995, 98–109), Nāgārjuna often forthrightly states his intention to proclaim "right views" in the *MMK,* which is not, as is the *Vigrahavyāvartani,* written in the *genre* of *vāda-vitāṇḍa*(refutation-only debate).

28 "*atma-saṃyamakaṃ cetaḥ parānugrāhakaṃ ca yat /maitraṃ sa dharmaḥ tad bījaṃ phalasya pretya ceha ca//*" (*MMK* 17:1). I use in this chapter a slightly altered version of the transliteration of the Saṇskṛta text of the *MMK* given in Kalupahana, 1986, but for reasons that will be explained in the notes that follow, I've found it necessary to offer my own translation.

29 The present *parīkṣā* has been the subject of considerable interpretive debate among the *MMK's* English translators. Inada speculates that Nāgārjuna is out to refute two rival theories of *karma,* one which sees the transition from act to moral fruit as one of continuity *(śāśvata)* and the other which sees it terms of interruption *(ucceda),* making verse 20 the announcement of the *prasanga* method of refuting these rival explanations (1970, 104–5). Garfield, who concurs with Inada that verse 20 and not verse 13 is the pivot verse of the chapter, outlines four different Buddhist theories of karma that Nāgārjuna is after, though he does not detail who the representatives of these views are supposed to be (1995, 231–44). For reasons I will explain further shortly, it seems to me that the *parīkṣā* can be divided up into roughly four sections: verses 1–5 clarifying the terms and moral goals of the basic Buddhist view of karma-*phala;* verses 6–12 rejecting a decidedly early Vaibhāṣika view; verses 21–33 refuting two possible Sarvāstivāda interpretations; and sandwiched in the middle of the chapter in verses 13–20 is Nāgārjuna's own highly metaphorical view of karma interspersed with a few remaining rejoinders of the just-dispensed-with initial Vaibhāṣika position.

30 Nāgārjuna characterizes and refutes these views in *MMK* 17:6–12 and 17:21–24, and space limitations prevent me from entering into detail about these arguments. Significantly, however, the polemic of Nāgārjuna against the latter view in verses 28–33, which famously ends by comparing all agents and acts and fruits to "the cities of the *gandharvas,* the illusions of sleep" *(kleśāḥ karmāṇi dehāś ca kartāraś ca phalāni ca gandharva-nagarākārā maīīci-svapna-saṃnibhūḥ)* is solely directed at the

pratyaya-samutannaṃ *karma* depiction and is not, as Inada (1970, 105) takes it, a general denial of any conception of moral agency.

31 Kalupahana is basically right, contra Inada and Garfield, in seeing these stanzas as representing Nāgārjuna's genuine view (1986, 249–54). Nowhere else in the *MMK* can what Nāgārjuna defends be found to depart from views of the "Buddhas" and *Pratyeka*-Buddhas he relies on, and his citation of enlightened beings in both verses 13 and 20 provide the proper frame for his own position, not to mention the fact that verse 13 declares the idea he sets forth there to be "fitting" *(yojyate)*, an appellation his does not grant to any of the other purported notions in the *parīkṣā*.

32 See for instance the third-century BCE *Arthaśāstra,* 3:1:39–40, where *vyavahāra* is deemed to be witness given in a court proceeding (Rangarajan, 1992, 380), the first-century CE's *Manusmṛti*,8, where the term clearly is meant in the sense of a court proceeding and the "eighteen titles of law" are called *vyavahāra-pada* (Sharma, 2003, 314–90) and the third-century *Dharmasũtras* of Gautama, 11–13, where the term refers to a number of areas of regulated trade (see Olivelle, 1999, 97–102).

33 See the translation of Sprung, 1979, 230.

34 The entire first three books of the *Arthaśāstra* define *vyavahāra* alternatively as a legal transaction, a contract stipulating the terms of a transaction, and as either live or documented testimony given in a court proceeding. The fact that the term was in such widespread usage some four centuries before Nāgārjuna should leave us little doubt that, in employing the term, he had at minimum moral and legal senses of it in mind.

35 See Gautama's *Dharmasũtras* 11–13 in Olivelle, 1999, 97–102.

36 Sprung, 1979, 119.

37 Caputo hints at this critique when he points out that Derrida's vision of the gift, messianic in spirit, "is concerned with the possibilities that open up for the outsiders, the political, social, national, sexual outsiders" in a way that Nāgārjuna's "gentle play of harmony and benignity" could never be (1997b, 186–8). Caputo's understanding of Nāgārjuna appears rather uninformed and his impression even somewhat Orientalist, but against the backdrop of this difference between the thinkers, the critique of Nāgārjuna may be available.

38 *MMK* 24:1–7.

39 Some important clarification is in order for my translation of the obviously historically influential verse 24:18. The key divergences in my translation are of the terms *"pratītyasamutpāda"* and *"sā prajñaptir upādāya."* The word *pratītya* idiomatically means to "reach" or "attain" and so philosophically it means "to complete" or "to establish." Much more important is the controversial phrase *"sā prajñaptir upādāya."* It was Candrakīrti who first wrote that this expression was an independent *pada* in the verse and thus was synonymous *(viśeṣa-saṃjñā)* with the other three terms, co-arising, emptiness, and the middle path (Nagao, 1991, 191). Gadjin Nagao points out rightly that this hermeneutic led almost single-handedly to the interpretations of the Chinese *San-lun* and later *Tiantai* Buddhist extrapolation of the "threefold truth" *(ibid.)*. But the treatment of the phrase *"sā prajñaptir upādāya"* as such an independent term that is synonymous with the other "terms" in the verse has proliferated quite improbable interpretations, such as Nagao's elaborate "dialectic of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śũnyatā*" (1991, 191–4) and Burton's argument that Nāgārjuna, in equating *pratītyasamutpāda* with *prajñaptisat,* was positing the merely conceptual and unreal nature of the empirical world as a whole, making Nāgārjuna a "nihilist" (1999, 92–116). I would argue, however, that Candrakīrti's imaginative grammatical hermeneutic, hardly uncommon in the Saṇskṛta commentarial tradition as a whole, is simply that. There is no convincing evidence that the *MMK* ever used the phrase *"prajñaptir upādāya"* in any independently technical sense; that expression only occurs in the instant verse of the entire treatise, and the word *"prajñapty"* only occurs one other time in 22:11, where, in describing terms like *"śũnya"* and *"aśũnya,"* it is declared these are only

"names made for the purpose of communicating" *(prajñapty arthaṃ tu kathyate)* and not articulation *(na vaktavyam)*. In verse 24:18, then, the first line of the *śloka* equates co-arising with emptiness, and the second line declares that appropriating *(upādāya)* the formulation in those words *(sā prajñaptir)* captures the "middle view" of the Buddha.

40 In the works of the late B.S.Yadav, Buddhism in general, and its Mādhyamika strand in particular, are primarily a protest against the pervasive castism of Brāhminical systems, a hermeneutic self-consciously redolent of that of B.R. Ambedkar (Berger, 2001, 282–3).

41 *MMK* 24:10.

3
ZHUANGZI'S ETHICS OF DECONSTRUCTING MORALISTIC SELF-IMPRISONMENT

Standards without standards

Dan Lusthaus

Are there any reliable guidelines for human action? And if so, what are they?

Starting in the spring and autumn period in China (*c.* 722–481 BCE), this question preoccupied social theorists such as Confucius, Mozi, and Laozi. During the Warring States period (*c.* fifth century BCE-221 BCE), such inquiries intensified, growing more complex as the question expanded from simply expounding guidelines (as one finds, for instance in the Confucian *Analects*) to a variety of attempts to establish justifications for the various standards being advocated by competing scholars (such as the theories of human nature in *Mencius* and *Xunzi;* logic and the will of heaven in *Mozi;* etc.). This period saw not only debates about moral and political standards, but a pursuit of standards of all sorts: how to measure and partition land; weights and measures for commerce and construction; musical tuning theories, etc.[1] While metrological standards have varied during Chinese history (e.g., the actual length of a Chinese inch has varied over time), during the Warring States period they were quite uniform. Standardization also means uniformity. The Warring States ended with the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, which not only unified China for the first time, but carried the program of standardization forward, standardizing such things as the writing script, which has remained the standard until modern times. Bringing things into uniformity, when applied to people, means promoting conformity, so that people think alike. If a ruler's strength and effectiveness can be measured by his military capability and the loyalty of his subjects, having a populace unified, of "one mind" with his will, is a ruler's strength. Not surprisingly, texts such as *Mozi* and *Guanzi* advocate this standardization and unification of the mind of the people for precisely these reasons.

An idea that pervaded not only the writings and systems of early Chinese thinkers, but is to be found in most human discourse whose intent is defining what it means to be civilized and proper, proposes that *standards*—moral standards, ethical standards, political standards, human and/or cosmic principles—must be identified and articulated so that the "right" standards may serve as a foundation on which humans can organize and institutionalize better, or even perfect, human societies. Such standards may be received from or enshrined in religious scriptures, national constitutions, principles extracted from observing and analyzing natural or social orders, axioms and maxims from a variety of respectable sources that come to be valorized as conventional wisdom, or "moral imperatives." Such standards are touted as guides designed to advise humans

on how to act, think, behave toward each other, and how to evaluate the actions and words of others as well as themselves. Once standards are set, all "proper" activities must conform to their dictates, all people must justify their actions according to their strictures. Some standards, such as those in scriptures, may be considered inviolable and unchangeable, though novel interpretations will proliferate, including new understandings that nonetheless are taken to be recoveries of the original intention and meaning. Constitutions may be open to revision, amendment, as well as novel interpretations and applications. Observations and analytic conclusions invariably differ between groups, regardless of field of investigation. A culture's full archive of axioms and maxims invariably contains so many contradictory and opposing recommendations that the resulting dilemmas typically employ one or another thread within that archive as justifiers for desired actions rather than as rational principles by which to ascertain which actions are better or worse in specific situations. Moral imperatives, by at once universalizing a definition of what a moral being *ought to* think and believe in order to be a moral being (i.e., rational, with rationality itself being defined as intrinsically concurring with certain stated propositions), while at the same time insisting that this is not a recommendation from without but something justifiably expected to be found within any individual who is properly human, effectively provided a way of judging others according to their degree of compliance to this universal principle.

While the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* also offer their own visions about how people should see things and act, they are perhaps unique in ancient China as challenging, in profound, devastating, and ultimately ethical ways, the very idea that standards solve rather than create social problems. They both argue that codes of standards do not engender social harmony; instead they provide a yardstick by which to judge, punish, ostracize, and disable others, i.e., standards create the contentious lines across which social friction grows. Rules don't curtail misbehavior, but encourage people to become craftier, more clever, in order to outsmart the rules, find the loopholes, exploit the parameters, and to shield their own misdeeds and crimes. The *Zhuangzi*, as we will see, claims that promotion of such principles and values is a form of voluntary imprisonment into which those desiring to be virtuous (*de* 德) will devote their energies.

The *Daodejing's* critique of moral standards

The *Daodejing's* critique of standards is found throughout the text, but most especially in the block of chapters 17 through 19, where we are given models of decay.[2] As people lose a sense of Dao,[3] they grasp after increasingly flimsier imitations, moral platitudes, and valorized ideals such as ren 仁(humankind-ness), *yi* 義 (social codes for human interaction), *li* 禮 (ritual, etiquette, prescribed norms), loyalty, and so on. These, Laozi says, are not cures but symptoms of decline. Since they are counterproductive, accomplishing the opposite of what they intend, abandoning them would be the better cure. He provides the reasoning for this in chapter 38, which begins: "Higher *de* doesn't [concern itself with] *de*, and so it has *de*. Lower *de* doesn't lose [its desire to accrue] *de*, and so it has no *de*." He explains this as follows:

Higher *de* is wuwei 無為(i.e., non-deliberative),
And is without taking deliberate action 而無以為.

Lower *de* deliberates [and acts] toward others 下德為之,
And has the taking of deliberate action 而有以為.

A Confucian would object that this sort of thinking is perverse, that only an inadequate or misguided moral approach would have such results. Laozi responds by explicitly introducing the Confucian virtues to the discussion, designating them as "the highest" or "best" (*shang* 上), to emphasize that he is allowing for the best-case scenario for each of these virtues. He writes:

The best *ren* deliberates toward others 上仁為之,
But it is without taking deliberate action 而無以為.

The best *yi* deliberates toward others 上義為之,
And has the taking of deliberate action 而有以為.

We notice immediately that the definition of the best *yi* is identical to lower *de*, the type of pursuit of virtue that is itself non-virtuous. We also notice that the higher *ren* is a composite of attributes of both higher and lower *de*, as defined earlier in the chapter. That it deliberates toward others is like lower *de;* that it doesn't actually do anything (*ren* is an attitude, not an actual behavior) makes it harmless or impotent, to some extent, thus similar to the *wuwei* of the higher *de*.

So the higher or best *de* is the one devoid of obsession over *de*. *Ren* is a step below this, harmless because it doesn't impose itself, but problematic because it, too, involves an obsessive idea. The lower *de*, which is the best *yi*, by not relinquishing its concern with *de*, is devoid of *de*, and by foisting itself on others imposes real problems in the world. The next line shows where this descent leads:

The best *li* (prescribed rules) deliberates toward others 上禮為之,
And when they don't reciprocate 而莫之應,
One rolls up one's sleeves and forces them 則攘臂而扔之.

Rules are made to be obeyed. One needn't forge rules for natural behaviors, but only for those sorts of things that someone might be inclined to violate. One needn't legislate that everyone must breathe; they will do so naturally. No *li* is required. Prescribing when or where or how to breathe would be another matter. Since people are naturally inclined to do otherwise than the prescribed rules (otherwise the rules wouldn't have to be

prescribed), *li* guarantees social contention and worse. Confucians and moralists propound their ideals and virtues in the name of greater social and spiritual peace, but only establish conditions that guarantee the precise opposite outcome.

Laozi understands that there is a psychological need at play as well. Firm, rock-solid principles and rules give us a sense of security. But these, he argues, offer only a false sense of security.

> Hence, lose Dao, and subsequently [people focus on] *de*.
> Lose *de*, and subsequently [people focus on] *ren*.
> Lose *ren*, and subsequently [people focus on] *yi*.
> Lose *yi*, and subsequently [people focus on] *li*.
>
> As to *li*, it is a flimsy type of loyalty 夫禮者，忠信之薄,
> And the origin of confusion/rebellion 而亂之首.

If one, by one's outer appearance and activities, gives the impression that one is compliant while inwardly plotting otherwise, rebellion is being deceptively hatched, unobserved. The more stringent the rules that one is pretending to comply with, the more urgent will be one's sense of rebellion. So, instead of guaranteeing loyalty, *li* provides the perfect smokescreen for rebellious plotters. *Li*, in other words, instigates rebellious feelings and simultaneously provides the screen behind which the rebellion can be planned and implemented. History, especially Chinese court history, bears out the truth of Laozi's argument.

Along with a sense of security, another reason moralists give for the advisability of setting standards is that they provide a sense of normalcy, of predictable norms. One assumes that actions and consequences are predictable, so by establishing and following norms, one controls outcomes. Laozi dismisses this argument as well:

> Figuring things out beforehand is the superficial fluff of Dao
> 前識者道之華,
> And the inception of stupidity 而愚之始.
>
> Therefore a man of great character dwells in what is reliable
> 是以大丈夫處其厚,
> And doesn't reside in the flimsy 不居其薄;
> He dwells in its solidity 處其實,
> And doesn't reside in superficial fluff 不居其華.
>
> Hence, he leaves that, and takes hold of this 故去彼取此.

And what is this solid, reliable thing that the person of great character takes hold of instead of grasping at an unpredictable, flimsy, false sense of security? It is the lack of standards, which is Dao itself. That will serve as the foundation for Zhuangzi's aporetic ethics, as will be illustrated below.

It cannot be overemphasized how influential this line of thinking was for Zhuangzi. Moralistic pursuits leading to moral decline, good intentions accomplishing the opposite of what they aim for, abandonment of standards and their justifications, the unpredictability of outcomes, all these and more are themes and issues to which the *Zhuangzi* returns repeatedly. It is also important to keep in mind that the abandonment of moralism and idealism advocated by Laozi and Zhuangzi is neither immoral nor amoral, but thoroughly ethical. It is a better way to live, better for oneself and for others.

Zhuangzi's aporetic ethics

I have elsewhere described in detail Zhuangzi's aporetic ethics,[4] and will not repeat here that close reading of a number of crucial extended passages from the *Zhuangzi*. For convenience, a quick summary of some conclusions reached there may be useful. That essay consisted of three parts. The first offered a thorough analysis of the famous butterfly dream at the end of chapter 2, stressing that its point is not to glorify the twilight impasse of being uncertain whether one is awake or dreaming, but that Zhuangzi moves past the impasse by declaring that between these options—a butterfly dreaming he is Zhuangzi and Zhuangzi who has dreamt he was a butterfly—there is a necessary (*bi* 必) distinction, and that is the transformation of things.

Zhuangzi's butterfly dream is about the necessity of dreaming in order *to wake from it,* to become aware of real and necessary distinctions ("There *must* be a difference"). The butterfly embodies the philosophy many readers attribute to Zhuangzi himself: forgetfulness, carefree meandering, etc. It is Zhuangzi's dream, not his reality. When he wakes up, finding himself unmistakably the real Zhuangzi, he wonders whether he dreams or the dream dreams him. But there is a *necessary* difference between them.

Derrida speaks of this necessity, substituting his own dream of an "idiomatic writing" that recovers unity[5] in the place of Zhuangzi's alter-ego happily fluttering about, carefree, having forgotten he is Zhuangzi:

> As for the dream of a unity, or finally of a place: In *Le Nouvel Observateur,* at several points, I speak of the dream of an idiomatic writing, and I call it Necessity; this dream is forever destined to disappointment; this unity remains inaccessible; that does not mean that the dream is but a fantasy, imaginary, a secondary moment; this "dream" institutes speech, writing, the voice, its timbre. There cannot not be this dream, this dreamed-of-desire of a purely idiomatic voice that would be what it is and would be in some way indivisible. Even if this dream is destined to remain a dream, the promise—it is better to speak of promise instead of dream—the promise, as promise, is an event, it exists; there is the promise of unity and that is what sets desire in motion; there is desire. To say that desire is destined to remain desire does not prevent desire, and

> desire is the essential motion of this speech or this writing. Thus, to speak of dream is not to speak of an accidental surplus; it is the essence of the thing, this "dream." The words "dream," "desire," or "ghost" must be redetermined on the basis of this necessity, the thinking of this necessity.
>
> (Derrida, 1995a, 136)

Don't readers of Zhuangzi commonly see his "forgetfulness," "carefree meandering," and the other trappings of an extraordinarily forgetful life with a knack,[6] as Zhuangzi's promise of a "place" or the possibility of living such a life? A life that Zhuangzi himself knew only as this sort of dream Derrida describes? Zhuangzi recovers himself, or his own fragments that remain always and necessarily fragmented by a necessary difference, by waking from and thinking past a dream that he, on some level, can not live without.

In the second part of my essay I provided a detailed analysis of several portions of *Zhuangzi's* "Autumn Floods" chapter (ch. 17), highlighting two complex models embedded in that chapter, one which I labeled the Temporality-Knowledge model, and the other the Perspectival model. The first is built on four axioms:

1 Measuring (lit. "weighing, evaluating") things is without end (*liang wuqiong* 量無窮).
2 Time is without stopping (*shi wuzhi* 時無止).
3 Apportionment is without permanence (*fen wuchang* 分無常).
4 Ends and beginnings are without [necessary predictable] reasons/ causes (*zhong shi wugu* 終始無故).

(HY 42/17/15[7])

These are *absences* of a limit or circumscriptive factor by which one can control them. As for the *Daodejing* 38 discussed above, the truly solid foundation is the *absence* of false assurances that the uncontrollable can be controlled. Zhuangzi says that the one of Great Knowledge (*da zhi* 大知) knows these as his guiding axioms, i.e., he knows what he doesn't know and can't control.[8] This is the aporetic foundation of his ethics.

Derrida, without knowing it, astutely describes Zhuangzi's aporetic ethics:

> [My] seminar on friendship is at least an attempt, by following that guiding thought, to reconstitute the matrix of a great number of political philosophemes and to place them in a network. In this domain nothing is clear or given any more than in any other. However, this does not stop one from calculating strategies and taking decisions or responsibilities. I would even say that it is to the extent that knowledge does not program everything in advance, to the extent that knowledge remains suspended and undecided as to action, to the extent that a responsible decision as such will never be measured by any form of knowledge, by a clear and distinct certainty or by a theoretical judgement, that there can and must be responsibility or decision, be they ethical or political. I am a citizen, too.
>
> (Derrida, 2002b, 178)

The Perspectival model offers six perspectives, the first three of which will be sufficient to illustrate the model's character and import:

> Observing (things) by way of Dao, things have no "worthwhile" (*gui* 貴) or "worthless" (*jian* 賤).
>
> Observing them by way of things, each considers itself (*zi* 自) "important" *(gui)* while all consider others "less important" *(jian).*
>
> Observing them by way of common-convention (*su* 俗), "honorable" *(gui)* and "contemptible" *(jian)* are not defined by individuals, [but communally].
>
> (*HY* 43/17/29–30)

The conflicting agendas of communal vs. personal standards is familiar in virtually all ethical systems. *Gui* and *jian* are the prototypical Chinese terms of that era for "positive value" and "negative value," respectively. The interesting perspective is the perspective of Dao, for which *gui* and *jian* do not obtain at all. It is valueless, and assigns no value, including and especially to itself, so it lacks the justificatory requisites by which one could esteem it above any other perspective, such as personal or communal standards. Though itself valueless, it is the condition upon which all other values depend.

The third part of that essay examined a model from the second chapter of *Zhuangzi,* known as the Eight Virtues model.

> Now Dao has never had boundaries, words have never had permanence. Consider "this is right" (*shi* 是) and there are borders. Allow me to offer a word about these borders.
>
> There is Left, there is Right. There are discussions (*lun* 倫), there are debates (*yi* 義). There are divisions (*fen* 分), there are disputes (*bian* 辯). There are emulations (*jing* 競), there are contentions (*zheng* 爭). These are called "the Eight *De* 德."[9]
>
> Beyond the six realms the sage exists but doesn't discuss. Within the six realms the sage discusses but doesn't debate. [In times like those described in] *The Spring and Autumn Classic's* generations of former kings at [crossed] purposes, the sage debates but he doesn't dispute.
>
> Thus, those who divide have not [really] divided, those who discriminate have not [really] discriminated. You say, How is that? The sage cherishes it [i.e., *Dao,* in his heart], the multitudes dispute it, trying to display [and foist their own understanding] on each other. Hence it is said: "Those who dispute have not seen (*bujian* 不見)."
>
> (*HY* 5/2/55–8)

This model can be read in several ways, e.g., as Zhuangzi's theory of history (how sociological divisions institutionalize), as an illustration of how dividing things up

eventually exceeds the ability of those desiring to divide to muster the thinking that would be required to actually introduce any divisions, and so on. I attempted a phenomenological interpretation of orientation in the essay. The sage, beyond conventionally decided directions (north, south, east, west, up, and down), has his own right and left, between which he is centered, whichever way he turns. To interact with others, to engage an intersubjective world, conventional directions have to be agreed upon (so that my right opposite your left as we face each other doesn't leave us interminably at odds, nor require one of us to face in the same direction as the one we were facing, i.e., that everyone has to see the same way by looking in the same direction). Once debates degenerate into disputes, things are already divided up, sides have been taken, so "dividers" no longer divide, and discriminators are indiscriminate in their discrimination. Basically they act unthinkingly (which Zhuangzi does *not* condone). Finally imitators and contenders merely act out the theories of others, inflicting the ideas they have inherited from those above on themselves and others.

This model was a direct response to one of the primary Mohist arguments for why standards are necessary.[10]

> Now, how is this doctrine to be examined? Mozi said: Some standard of judgment must be established [言必立儀]. To expound a doctrine without regard to the standard is similar to determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel [言而毋儀，譬猶運鈞之上，而立朝夕者也].
>
> (Mei, 1929, 182–3)

Zhuangzi is assuring the Mohists that he is neither dizzy, nor without orientation when "beyond the six directions." It is the moralists, like Mohists and Confucians, who are confused about directions and standards. As he states in his Perspectival model:

> Observing them by way of utility (*gong* 功):
>
> "If, because of something having [usefulness] (*you* 有) we have [use] *(you)* for it, then among the 10,000 things none do not have [use]. If, because of its being without (*wu* 無) [usefulness] we have no *(wu)* [use] for it, then among the 10,000 things none are not [use]less *(wu)*.
>
> "If you know that East and West oppose each other, and yet they are impossible to use without each other, then you have determined [how] utility is apportioned."
>
> (*cf. HY* 43/17/30–4)

Incidentally, Mozi's potter's wheel analogy was apparently well known in China, since it occurs in other texts, such as the *Guanzi,* which adds several additional analogies to it.[11]

The *Mozi* on standards

Having set out some of the aspects of the critiques against setting standards in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi,* we need to examine the proposals of some of their contemporaries, to see what sort of standards—and what sort of arguments justifying standards—were floated in those days. That literature is too vast and complex to be amenable to simple encapsulation, so a few judicious selections will have to suffice.

The *Mozi* is a sizeable, rich text, composed and compiled over several centuries, beginning with the teachings of Mozi, usually considered either a very young contemporary of Confucius or belonging to the next generation. The text is filled with brilliant flashes of logic and reasoning, some of the earliest Chinese attempts at epistemological investigation, the only ancient Chinese programmatic attempt at developing a univocal philosophical technical jargon for reasoning and debate, sections on optics, geometry, and military advice. It is also rife with contradictions, in part because, as early testimony from Zhuangzi and Xunzi explain, there were three distinct Mohist schools that vied with each other. The *Mozi* preserves the alternate versions of the teachings that each of the three schools developed from, supposedly, the same original Mozi teaching. This is clear from the fact that there are three versions of many chapters, each containing overlapping templates (though the wording could be somewhat different, and each introduces different digressions and developments). Many sections of the *Mozi* are no longer extant; sometimes only one or two of the original three versions of a chapter has been preserved. But all the contradictions cannot be attributed to this sectarianism alone. For instance, they promoted the idea of loving or caring for all people equally, regardless of family or other intimate relations, yet condoned killing "evil" doers, and even justified wars that sought to eliminate evil elements. But we needn't detain ourselves exposing such contradictions, since what we seek to observe in the *Mozi* is its discussion of standards.

In chapter 49 ("Lu's Question") the *Mozi* summarizes its "Ten Key Teachings" in an interesting context. Five types of national problems are identified, and for each problem a pair of teachings is prescribed. Thus these teachings were understood as specific remedies for specific problems. Each of these teachings is discussed at various points throughout the many chapters of the Mozi; most are the main themes (and titles) of distinct chapters.

The problems and their solutions are:

> Mozi said: Upon entering a country, one should locate the need and work on that.

If a country (*guo jia* 國家) is		then teach (*ze yu zhi* 則語之)	
A.	in upheaval, chaos, turmoil, rebellion, confusion 昏亂 *hun luan*	1.	Idealizing the Worthies 尚賢 *shang xian*
		2.	Identifying with Superiors 尚同 *shang tong*
B.	in poverty 貧 *pin*	3.	Economy of Expenditures 節用 *jie yong*
		4.	Simplicity in Funerals 節葬 *jie zang*
C.	Indulging in music and wine 喜音湛湎 *xi yin zhan jiu*	5.	Condemnation of music 非樂 *fei yue*
		6.	Anti-fatalism 非命 *fei ming*
D.	Insolent and without propriety 淫僻無禮 *yin pi wu li*	7.	Venerating Heaven 尊天 *zun tian*
		8.	Worshiping Spirits 事鬼 *shi gui*
E.	Engaged in conquest and oppression 務奪侵淩 *wu duo qin ling*	9.	Universal love 兼愛 *jian ai*
		10.	Condemning offensive war 非攻 *gong*

The three chapters of Book II (chs. 8–10) of the *Mozi* are each titled “Exaltation of the Virtuous,” Book III’s three chapters (chs. 11–13) are titled “Identification with Superiors”; Book IV has three chapters (chs. 14–16) titled “Universal Love”; the three chapters of Book V (17–19) are “Condemnation of Offensive War”; Book VI has three chapters (20–23) titled “Economy of Expenditures” and three chapters (24–26) titled “Simplicity in Funerals.” Book IX has two chapters (23–24) titled “Condemnation of Music” and three titled “Anti-fatalism” (35–37) [plus two chapters titled “Anti-Confucianism”]. Book VII consists of three chapters (26–28) each labeled “Will of Heaven,” and Book VIII has three chapters (29–31) “On Ghosts” and the first chapter on “Condemnation of Music” (32).

Thus it is easy to see that the Ten Teachings give a fairly full résumé of the Mohist concerns. (Note that chs. 22–4, 29–30, 33–4, and 38 are no longer extant, though their titles survive.)

Laozi and Zhuangzi were neither the first nor the only philosophers in ancient China to challenge sacred cows. The *Mozi* contains a passage that is not only anti-Confucian, but, in its implications, possibly “un-Chinese,” as that would be understood for the last two thousand years.[12]

> EC 9: Do not justify doing more for parents than for others by their conduct, but do pay attention to their conduct.
>
> TC 2A/6–9: Doing more for those for whom duty requires more, less for those for whom duty requires less, is what is meant by "arranging according to grade." Men whose acts deserve gratitude, rulers, superiors, the aged, one's elders, are all persons for whom one does more. Doing more for a man because he is an elder, one does not do less for man because he is younger. One does more or less according to degrees of kinship, as far as the remotest degree which does not impose a duty. "Do not justify doing more for parents by their conduct, but do pay attention to their conduct" encourages sons to recognize what is deep or shallow in their parents, to improve them where they can be improved, honour them where they deserve honour. By the standard laid down by the sage[13] you forget your parents when they die, for the sake of the world. Doing more for parents than for others is your portion, and finishes with the rites of death and farewell.
>
> (Graham, 1978, 255f.)

The Confucian "family values" that eventually Daoists and even Buddhists had to embrace to become acceptable to Chinese sensibilities are here challenged, but in the practical, reasonable manner characteristic of *Mozi*. Confucius, for instance, put strict limits on children's ability to remonstrate with their parents,[14] and the subsequent tradition virtually outlawed it.

As to establishing standards, the fourth chapter of the *Mozi,* titled *fa yi* 法儀, which Mei (1929) translates as "On the necessity of standards," argues as follows:[15]

> Mozi said: To accomplish anything whatsoever one must have standards *[fa yi]*. None have yet accomplished anything without them. The gentlemen fulfilling their duties as generals and councillors have their standards *[fa yi]*. Even the artisans performing their tasks also have their standards *[fa yi]*. The artisans make square objects according to the square, circular objects according to the compasses; they draw straight lines with the carpenter's line and find the perpendicular by a pendulum. All artisans, whether skilled or unskilled, employ these five standards [*wu fa* 五法]. Only the skilled workers are accurate. Though the unskilled labourers have not attained accuracy, yet they do better by following these standards than otherwise. Thus all artisans follow the standards in their work.
>
> Now, the government of the empire and that of the large states do not observe their standards [*fa* 法]. This shows the governors are even less intelligent than the artisans….
>
> (Mei, 1929, 13)

The analogy of using carpenter's squares and compasses for drawing squares and circles as superior to drawing freehand is ubiquitous in ancient Chinese literature.[16] Something

more than nature allows people to achieve their purpose and accomplish their tasks more perfectly. These tools are models that guide.

In a passage in chapter 5 that is diametrically opposed to Mencius' teaching (it is uncertain whether Mencius was responding to this passage or vice versa), employing the example of a child falling in a well—better known from Mencius' use of it—to argue that *ren* is innate in our nature, the *Mozi* contends:

> Now, if carrying her child and drawing water from a well, a woman dropped the child into the well, she would of course endeavour to get it out. But famine and death is a much greater calamity than the dropping of a child. Should there not be also endeavour (to prevent it)? People are gentle and kind when the year is good, but selfish and vicious when it is bad. Yet, how can they be held responsible? When many produce but few consume then there can be no bad year; on the contrary, when few produce but many consume then there can be no good year. Thus it is said: scarcity of supply should stimulate study of the seasons and want of food demands economy of expenditures.
>
> (Mei, 1929, 19)

The upshot is to "study" (agriculture, economics, meteorology, etc.) so that one can properly manipulate conditions to best effect.

Elsewhere, in contrast to the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* "degenerative" models, the *Mozi* provides a view of history in which Heaven's direct involvement ushered in progress.[17]

> As we look back to the time when there was yet no ruler, it seems the custom was "everybody in the world according to his own standard [*yi* 義]." Accordingly each man had his own standard, ten men had ten different standards, a hundred men had a hundred different standards—the more people the more standards. And everybody approved of his own view and disapproved those of others, and so arose mutual disapproval.[18] Even father and son and brothers became enemies, since they were unable to reach any agreement. Surplus energy was not employed for mutual help; excellent teachings (Dao) were kept secret; surplus goods were allowed to rot without sharing. The disorder in the (human) world could be compared with that among birds and beasts. The lack of regulations governing the relationships between ruler and subject, between superior and subordinate, and between elder and younger, and the absence of rules governing the relationships between father and son and between older and younger brothers, resulted in disorder in the world.
>
> Knowing the cause of the confusion to be in the absence of a ruler who could unify the standards [*jiao* 教] in the world,[19] (Heaven) chose the virtuous, sagacious, and wise in the world and crowned him emperor, charging him with the duty of unifying the wills in the empire.
>
> (Mei, 1929, 59)

Here we see the seeds of Zhuangzi's Perspectival model, described earlier. Mozi contrasts the individual perspective (Zhuangzi's "each considers itself 'important' while all consider others 'less important'") with a communal standard to which everyone should assent (Zhuangzi's "observing them by way of common-convention"). However, while Zhuangzi remains aporetic between the personal versus the communal, grounding both in Dao, a standardless standard, and allowing that each has its appropriate time and place, Mozi has Heaven establish a standard that Mozi will strive to make communally accepted.

In chapter 11, Mozi states: "How was order brought to the village, state, etc.? By unifying standards." Unifying standards here means deferring to the next rung up on the power hierarchy. In chapter 13, Mozi contends that while the ruler must respond to the needs of the people, he nonetheless establishes order by getting people to defer to authority figures. Hierarchical power structures are necessary. It is imperative to "standardize" the hierarchical relations between ruler, ministers and common people. Heaven, he claims, wants the ruler to unify standards.

Chapter 16 displays Mozi's method of ethical reasoning, in this case making the case for universal over parochial concerns:

> Mozi said: *Partiality is to be replaced by universality*. But how is it that partiality can be replaced by universality? Now, when every one regards the states of others as he regards his own, who would attack the others' states? Others are regarded like self. When every one regards the capitals of others as he regards his own, who would seize the others' capitals? Others are regarded like self. When every one regards the houses of others as he regards his own, who would disturb the others' houses? Others are regarded like self. Now, when the states and cities do not attack and seize each other and when the clans and individuals do not disturb and harm one another—is this a calamity or a benefit to the world? Of course it is a benefit. When we come to think about the several benefits in regard to their cause, how have they arisen? Have they arisen out of hate of others and injuring others? Of course we should say no. We should say they have arisen out of love of others and benefiting others. If we should classify one by one all those who love others and benefit others, should we find them to be partial or universal? Of course we should say they are universal. Now, since universal love is the cause of the major benefits in the world, therefore Mozi proclaims universal love is right.
>
> (Mei, 1929, 88)

For our final *Mozi* passage, we return to the passage cited earlier about the potter's wheel, this time letting the argument continue. Each of the three anti-fatalism chapters provides subtle differences from the alternate versions. Here they are:

> Now, how is this doctrine to be examined? Mozi said: Some standard of judgment must be established [言必立儀]. To expound a doctrine without regard to the standard is similar to determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel.[20] By this means the

> distinction of right and wrong, benefit and harm, cannot be known. Therefore there must be three tests [*san biao* 三表]. [21] What are the three tests? Mozi said: Its basis, its verifiability, and its applicability.[22] How is it to be based? It should be based on the deeds of the ancient sage-kings. How is it to be verified? *It is to be verified by the senses of hearing and sight of the common people.*[23] How is it to be applied? It is to be applied by adopting it in government and observing its benefits to the country and the people. This is what is meant by the three tests of every doctrine.
>
> (Book 9, ch. 35)

Mei's English rendering makes the next passage more similar to the preceding than the Chinese itself reads.

> Mozi said: To make any statement or to publish any doctrine.[24] there must first be established some standard of judgment [*yi fa* 義法]. [25] To discuss without a standard [*wu yi* 無義] is like determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel.[26] Even skillful artisans could not get accurate results in that way. Now that the truth and error [情偽] (of a doctrine) in the world is hard to tell, there must be three tests [*san fa* 三法]. What are the three tests? They are the test of its basis, the test of its verifiability, and the test of its applicability. *To test the basis of a doctrine we shall examine the will of Heaven and spirits and the deeds of the sage-kings.*[27] To test its verifiability we shall go to the books of the early kings. As to its applicability it is to be tested by its use in the administration of justice and government. These then are the three tests of a doctrine.
>
> (Book 9, ch. 36)

And finally, the next chapter provides another version:

> Mozi said: In order to expound a doctrine there must be established some standard of judgment [先立儀而言]. To expound without a standard is similar to determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a potter's wheel that is turning.[28] I should think even such obvious distinctions as that between the directions of sunrise and sunset cannot be thus determined. Therefore every doctrine must stand three tests. What are the three tests [*san fa* 三法]? They are the test of its basis, the test of its verifiability, and the test of its applicability.[29] How is it to be based? It is to be based on the deeds of the early sage-kings. How is it to be verified? *It is to be verified by the testimony of the ears and eyes of the multitude.*[30] How is it to be applied? It is to be applied by being adopted in

> government and its effects on the people [國家萬民] being shown [而觀之]. These are called the three tests.
>
> (Book 9, ch. 37)

It is certainly intriguing that in what should be a central set of tenets, namely the three "tests" by which any teaching or doctrine should be measured, there are clear distinctions between the three versions (some of which I have highlighted with italics and in the square brackets and notes), revealing, perhaps, some of the key differences in outlook between the three Mohist schools. For one, verification is largely empirical; for another, it is theological; the last is close to the first, but includes "testimony," i.e., hearsay and verbal testimony, along with "the ears and eyes of the multitude." For instance, in the chapter "On Ghosts," one of the reasons Mozi offers for why we should believe in ghosts is that people have always reported seeing them, so one should accept the existence of ghosts as valid, even if one does not see them himself. Which of these alternatives, if any, is closest to Mozi's own teaching is anyone's guess. Each version, nevertheless, allows that final validity can only come after the theories in question have been implemented and measurable results obtained.

Whatever other differences may have existed between Mencius and the Mohists (Mencius effectively demonizes them, along with Yang Zhu), in one passage Mencius sounds like a Mohist:

> When the prince has no principles by which he examines [kui 揆, calculate, consider] *his administration,* and his ministers have no laws [*fa* 法] by which they keep themselves *in the discharge of their duties,* then in the court obedience is not paid to principle [*bu xin dao* 不信道, lit. doesn't trust Dao, i.e., the way of the ancients], and in the office obedience is not paid to rule [*du* 度]. Superiors violate the laws of righteousness [*yi* 義], and inferiors violate the penal laws [*xing* 刑]. It is only by a fortunate chance that a State in such a case is preserved.[31]
>
> (Legge, 1970, 290f. Interpolations mine)

Zhuangzi's critique of idealization

In an underappreciated passage from *Zhuangzi* 14,[32] Zhuangzi responds to an inquiry about ren 仁. Ren is treated in most Chinese literature—with the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* being the major exceptions—as the cardinal human virtue and ideal. This passage begins by challenging the anthrocentrism of the mainstream conception of *ren* and goes on to point out the folly of pursuing ideals, this latter point being an important theme in the *Daodejing* as well.[33]

In Chinese thought, especially—but not exclusively—among Confucians, *ren* signifies the highest sense of what it means to be human. The character *ren* graphically displays the "human person" radical on the left (人) and the number "two" (二) on the right,

suggesting it signifies the interrelation of two (or more) people. It has, along with translations such as "benevolence," "goodness," "kindness," etc., been rendered by leading translators as "humaneness" and "humanity." Indeed, for almost any other text, I would translate *ren* as "humankind-ness," i.e., the kindness stemming from a felt commonality between humans about their most intimate, shared, and yet individual nature. That feeling of human commonality, Confucians explain, translates into empathetic concern for others and the highest moral conduct. The *Zhuangzi* tries to shock those with such a view into recognizing a broader, more truly "common" sense of *ren*.

> Tang, the chief minister of Shang, asked Zhuangzi about *ren*.
> Zhuangzi said: "Tigers and wolves are *ren*."
> "What do you mean?"
> Zhuangzi said: "Their fathers and sons are affectionate with each other (*xiang qin* 相親). Why not consider that *ren*?"

The term *qin* 親 has several meanings in Chinese, all of which will be in play in this passage. It means "affectionate," "intimacy," something in close or direct relation (e.g., a direct cause, or a family relative); it also means "parent." The statement that tigers and wolves display *ren* would jar typical Chinese sensibilities for whom *ren* is exclusively, or predominantly human, exhibited in such things as filial piety (*xiao* 孝). *Ren,* for Confucians, is the ground and mark of civility, the civilizing humaneness that raises humans above mere beasts.[34] Zhuangzi is pointing out that *ren* as a type of intimate concern between parent and child is even found among species usually considered dangerous and barbaric. It is *not* exclusively human, nor is it a sign of civility. That there may be species lacking parent-child affection or interaction does not affect Zhuangzi's point, since he is not attempting a universal proposition about all species, but has restricted his comment specifically to tigers and wolves. Tang possibly concedes some minor sense of *ren* to other species, but refocuses his question, saying:

> "I was asking about Perfected ren (*zhi ren* 至仁)."

至*zhi,* "perfected," adjectively means "perfect, ultimate, the best," i.e., a positive superlative; verbally it means to arrive at, to have reached a desired destination, and, hence, to have accomplished or perfected what one had set out to do. Tang has been asking about idealized *ren,* the "fully arrived, fully achieved" *ren,* one which to typical Chinese thought would be an exclusively human goal and accomplishment. His idealization of *ren,* as Zhuangzi will now suggest, not only would place *ren* beyond the animal realm—which is what Tang's additional stipulation implied—but the human realm as well. It is an ideal toward which humans can aspire precisely because humans lack it.

> Zhuangzi said: "Perfected ren lacks *qin* 親."

Tigers and wolves, as even Tang conceded, display parent-child affection *(qin)*. But if Perfected *ren* is conceived of as something radically other than the affection and intimate concern that parents and offspring—animal or human—engage in with each other, than this sort of idealized *ren* would be, by definition, something other than *qin*, a statement as shocking to Chinese sensibilities as the claim that tigers and wolves are exemplars of *ren*.

> The chief minister said: "I have heard:
> 'If without intimacy *(qin),* then one doesn't love;
> If one doesn't love, then one is not filial *(xiao)*.'
> Could it be that you are saying that Perfected *ren* is not filial?"
> "Not so."

The chief minister sees the separation of Perfected *ren* from *qin* as a denial of the feelings—and obligations—between parents and children, and especially the obligations children are expected (by Confucians) to enthusiastically undertake toward their parents. Zhuangzi has already said that *ren* is the *mutual* affection *(xiang qin)* between parent and child, not just the one-way devotedness of children toward their parents. The relationship, even among tigers and wolves, is reciprocal, *xiang* 相. He is not denying the actual mutual intimacy between parents and children as the chief minister is accusing him of doing, but rather is critical of searching for *ren* in verbal concepts and ideals instead of where it naturally occurs and displays itself, such as among tigers and wolves and people. Zhuangzi explains:

> As to this, Perfected *ren* is an idealization *(shang* 尚*)*.[35] "Filial piety" *(xiao)* is an inadequate word for it. This is not going beyond the word "filial piety." [Rather, the idealized concept of Perfected *ren*] doesn't reach *(bu ji* 不及*)* the word "filial piety."
>
> As to this, if one walks south to Ying, even if he turns north he will be unable to see the dark mountains. Why is that? He has gone too far from them.

Zhuangzi is trying to illustrate how pursuit of reality via idealization distances one from the reality one seeks. Trying to understand *ren* by pursuing a vague, or even clear ideal—and if not engaged in such a pursuit, why ask about it in the first place; it would already be self-evident—rather than simply looking at its natural expressions all around, places one ever more remote from an understanding of *ren*. That pursuit sends one in the wrong direction. The more the ideal is pursued, the further one travels from what one sought in the first place, until it is totally out of sight. The ideal blinds one to the reality always already available everywhere. Zhuangzi also stresses that, contrary to expectations, it is not the case that the word "filial-affection" *(xiao)* is inadequate to reach the lofty ideal of "Perfected *ren*," but, on the contrary, it is the ideal that is incapable of even reaching the import of the word. Zhuangzi continues:

Hence it is said:

Filial piety out of respect is easy, but filial piety out of love is hard;

Filial piety out of love is easy, but to forget parents (*qin* 親; intimacy, concern) is hard;

To forget parents is easy, but to make parents forget oneself[36] is hard;

To make parents forget oneself is easy, but to forget everything under heaven is hard;

To forget everything under heaven is easy, but to make everything under heaven forget self is hard.

Now as to that, if a Virtuous one banishes Yao and Shun,[37] and doesn't try to act like them (*er bu wei ye* 而不為也), he would bestow benefits on ten thousand generations [unlike Yao and Shun whose rule has degenerated into the contemporary crises of our time], and the world would be unaware [of what he's done].[38]

Why longingly sigh such words as *"ren"* and "filial piety"? Now as to such words as "filial piety," "brotherhood," *"ren,"* "social appropriateness" (*yi* 義), "loyalty," "trustworthiness," "honor," and "scrupulous incorruptibility"—these are all devices for imprisoning men of virtue in their own self-exertions (to be virtuous).[39] They are not worth making much of.

Hence it is said: "Perfect Worth (*zhi gui* 至貴) discards the titles of the kingdom; Perfect Wealth discards the riches of the kingdom; and Perfect Aspiration (*zhi yuan* 至願) discards fame and praise. Therefore their ways are unwavering."

This critique is further developed in chapter 10 of *Zhuangzi,* "Rifling Trunks," but discussion of that must await another occasion.

Notes

1 See Theobald and Vogel, 2004.

2 Another crucial chapter is *Daodejing* 3, which begins: "Not aspiring for ideals (不尚賢) will make the people non-contentious." We will return to this later. The full text of chapter 38 cited below can be found in any standard edition of *Daodejing*. Here I primarily follow the ICP Concordance edition, *A Concordance to the Laozi,* p. 13. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

3 When *Dao* 道 signifies the honorific title of the Way (or Ways), I capitalize it; when used in other senses, such as the manner in which something is performed, it might better be rendered in lower case.

4 Lusthaus, 2003.

5 Elsewhere Derrida begins his response to the question, "What do you mean by 'idiomatic'?" by saying: "A property that one cannot appropriate; it signs you without belonging to you; it only appears to the other and it never comes back to you except in flashes of madness that bring together life and death, that bring you together dead and alive at the same time. You

dream, it's unavoidable, about the invention of a language or of a song that would be yours, not the attributes of a 'self,' rather the accentuated paraph, that is, the musical signature, of your most unreadable history. I'm not talking about a *style* but an intersection of singularities, habitat, voices, graphism, what moves with you and what your body never leaves…an interminable anamnesis whose form is being sought: not only *my* history, but culture, languages, families…" (Derrida, 1995a, 119).

6 E.g., *Zhuangzi*, ch. 1: "Now you have this big tree and you're distressed because it's useless. Why don't you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village, or the field of Broad-and-Boundless, relax and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it? Axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it" (Watson, 1968, 35). What a delicious promise!

7 *HY* is the Harvard-Yenching *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu* (1956).

8 Cf. *Daodejing* 71.

9 Commentators typically substitute 論 for 倫，議 for 義, and 德 for 得. See Lusthaus, 2003.

10 I have interpolated the Chinese from Zhang, 1994. This is the "Anti-fatalism" chapter, book 9, ch. 35.

11 *Guanzi*, 1995, fascicle 2, pp. 2 recto and verso. Cf. Rickett, 1985, 129.

12 EC and TC are Graham's way of identifying text portions that he has matched up. E and T are different sections of *Mozi*, T commenting sequentially on statements in E, which is not an uncommon literary technique for "commentaries" in early Chinese literature.

13 聖人之法 *shengren zhi fa;* Graham has rendered *fa* as "standard."

14 Cf. *Analects* 4:18.

15 Cf. Zhang, 1994, 30f.

16 Cf., e.g., *Mencius* 4A on the compass and square. At 4A.1 he remarks that Li Lou and Gong Shu could not make squares and circles by hand without those tools, nor could Music-master Kuang properly hear the five tones [*wu yin* 五音] without the six standardizing tuning pipes [*liu lü* 六律]. Even the great artists and masters require guiding accessories. Mencius extrapolates from this that humans need government and the laws or models [*fa* 法] of former kings, i.e., the *dao* of the former kings, to guide them as well. Also, "the compass and square [is how] squares and circles are achieved [or drawn perfectly] [*zhi* 至]; [From] sages human norms [*lun* 倫] are achieved [or reach perfection]." *A Concordance to Meng Tzu* (1966), 26f.

17 Bk. 3, ch. 12. Cf. Zhang, 1994, 70f.

18 是以人是其義。而非人之義。故交相非也。

19 明乎民之無正長，以一同天下之教而天下亂也。

20 言而毋儀，譬猶運鈞之上，而立朝夕者也。

21 故言必有三表。

22 有本之者，有原之者，有用之者。

23 下原察百姓耳目之實。

24 凡出言談由文學之為道也。

25 則不可而不先立義法。

26 譬猶立朝夕於員鈞之上也。

27 於其本之也，考之天鬼之志，聖王之事。

28 譬之猶運鈞之上，而立朝夕焉也。

29 有考之者，有原之者，有用之。

30 察眾之耳目之請（＝情?） 。
上無揆也，下無法守也，朝不信道，工不信度，君子犯義，小人犯刑，國之所
31 存者幸也。

32 *HY* 14/5–13. Watson, 1968, 155–6 translates it almost without comment, but obscures some of the crucial details; Mair, 1994, 130 characterizes it as a slipping in standards from the earlier part of this chapter, “having a pseudo Master Chuang discourse clumsily upon the relative merits of humaneness and filialness.” Graham, 1978, registers his disapproval by completely excluding it from his translation.

33 The *Daodejing* passage most germane to the argument pursued here comes from the beginning of ch. 3, as cited in a previous note: “Not aspiring for ideals will make the people non-contentious,” non-contention *(buzheng* 不爭), ironically, being one of the ideals promoted by *Daodejing*. Other echoes of *Daodejing* occur in the *Zhuangzi* passage we are about to discuss.

34 *Mencius* 6A is a locus classicus for this position.

35 Cf. *Daodejing* 3, cited in a previous note, for this use of *shang*.

36 *Wang wo* 忘我, which Mair, 1994, 132 understands as “to cause one’s parents to *forget themselves*…” This is also plausible. Forgetfulness *(wang)* is one of Zhuangzi’s signature notions; *wang wo* “forget self” here means to get rid of self-interest or self-aggrandizement.

37 Yao and Shun are two idealized sage-rulers of antiquity that current rulers were often exhorted to emulate. The passage could also be translated: “If a Virtuous one gets rid of [aspiring to be like the idealized sage-rulers] Yao and Shun…”

38 The anonymity of a sage’s actions is an important theme in *Daodejing*, e.g., chs. 2, 17, etc.

39 此皆自勉以役其德者也 *ci jie zi mian yi yi qi de zhe ye*. To paraphrase, this is a ruler’s or culture’s way of having men who are virtuous or who pursue becoming virtuous, channel their energy and efforts *(zi mian)* into their own self-imprisonment to that pursuit. Politically, it is a way of having them neutralize or imprison themselves, which, of course, is neither ideal nor virtuous.

4
DECONSTRUCTING KARMA AND THE APORIA OF THE ETHICAL IN HONGZHOU CHAN BUDDHISM

Youru Wang

I Preliminary remarks

In this chapter, I shall explore the ethical meaning, motif, and consequence of subverting conventional moral distinctions in the Hongzhou School of Chinese Chan Buddhism by examining the school's deconstruction of the concept of karma. I shall attempt to reveal the paradoxical or aporetical relationship between deconstruction and the ethical, and to reach a better understanding of the Chan strategy and its ethicality in the context of Chan soteriological practice. These attempts will show the trace of certain influences received from the contemporary discussions of Derridean deconstruction and its ethic,[1] although these influences are limited to their inspirations or the use of certain vocabularies. I am aware that since the 1990s, the study of Buddhist ethics has thrived in relative terms. A number of publications have contributed to a critical study of Chan/Zen ethic. However, none of them has utilized the most recent insights into the aporia of the ethical from the contemporary discussion of the Derridean ethic. Although Derridean and Chan Buddhist undertakings are deeply different, those contemporary insights, in my view, will offer us a new paradigm for the rethinking or reinterpreting of the ethical dimension of Chan. This attempt of reinterpretation will, in turn, illuminate our understanding of the Derridean ethic by probing the ethics of deconstruction in its other context or by articulating the other perspective on the same issue.

Before going to the details of this examination, I would also like to point out that very little ink has been spilt over the Chinese Chan discourse of karma in modern scholarship.[2] Scholars who turned away from it seem to believe that concepts such as karma and causality, so common or central to Indian Buddhist thought, are marginalized in Chinese Buddhism, especially in sinicized Buddhist thought such as Chan, due to the profound influence of indigenous Chinese thought and culture. The attitude also seems to suggest that Chinese Buddhists themselves have very little to offer regarding the topic of karma. However, having looked at Chinese Buddhist discourses and especially Chan texts, I find that as Buddhists, the Chinese still talk about karma and the concept is used throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism. This leads to one question: Did Chinese Buddhists make any significant contributions to the understanding of the idea of karma or did they just copy what Indian Buddhists had said? In other words, does Chinese Buddhist discourse shed any light on the topic of karma when engaging it in its unique cultural-historical context? This question has not yet been fully answered.

Recently, Japanese scholars of critical Buddhism have questioned the Chinese Buddhist faithfulness to the central teachings of Indian Buddhism such as causality. Their criticisms have called my attention to the issue of causality in Chinese Buddhist thought, including the concept of karma, which closely relates to causality. My initial study has found several important opinions about karma in Chinese Chan thought, especially in the thought of Hongzhou Chan. These opinions are significant for the understanding of Buddhist practice in general and of mainstream Chinese Chan in particular. However, this chapter will mainly focus on the deconstructive and ethical aspects of these opinions and leave the causal aspect to further discussion in another place.

II Radical overturning of fixed distinctions between good and bad karma, or between soteriological goals and karmic bondage

The early Buddhist tradition assumes various distinctions between what is wholesome and unwholesome, between deeds and karmic fruits, and between the cultivation of virtues or practice of meditations and the realization of enlightenment. These distinctions are necessary for Buddhist teaching and practice. However, the early tradition also involves warning about the dangers of attachments to moral cultivation, karmic fruits, meditative experience, and so on (Keown, 2001, 47–8, 101–2). This kind of warning reminds Buddhists of the inevitable task of overcoming fixation and attachment. It anticipates the upcoming struggles within Buddhism.

In Mahāyāna Buddhist discourse, the Perfection of Wisdom literature and Mādhyamika philosophy both emphasize the non-duality and emptiness of cause/effect, agent/fruit, and so on.[3] Although these discourses do not deny karma or cause/effect *per se,* they do deny any entities of self-existent nature and any fixed binary distinctions in regard to the reifications that have unfortunately evolved in certain Buddhist schools. These discourses are the Indian source and inspiration for Chinese Chan Buddhists to deconstruct the reified concepts of good and bad karma, cultivation and realization, or means and goal in their own context. This context not only involves the influence of other Mahāyāna scriptures, the *tathāgatagarbha* literature and Yogācāra School, but also involves the Chinese Buddhist preference and hermeneutic choice determined by the cultural environment and socio-practical situation. Out of this highly hybrid and complex context, Chan discourse—including its discourse of karma—arises. Although Chinese Chan Buddhists do not contribute another kind of Nāgārjunian philosophy, I find a strong echo of the spirit of Mādhyamika and especially the Perfection of Wisdom literature in the recorded sayings of Hongzhou Chan. However, the radicalness of their overturning of fixed distinctions between good and bad karma, soteriological goal and karmic bondage, cultivation and realization, etc., is distinctively their own. The following quote from the sayings of Hongzhou Chan illustrates my point:

> Question: “How can *Mahāparinirvāṇa* be attained?” Master: “By avoiding all those karmas that keep you in the circle of birth and death.” Question: “What are these karmas of birth and death?” Master: “Seeking *Mahāparinirvāṇa* is the karma of birth and death. Abandoning impurity and grasping purity is another. Harboring

> attainments and verifications of attainment is another, and so is failure to detach from disciplines and precepts."
>
> (Dazhu Huihai[4])

> If you do not realize the no-mind but act by attaching to forms of phenomena, all you create are nothing but the karma of demons. Even your devotion to the Pure Land and practice of other things of Buddhism are also like this.
>
> (Huangbo Xiyun[5])

> If there were such things as cultivation and attainment, they would all be just the karma of life and death. You say, "Observe all the six *pāramitās* and the ten thousand deeds." In my view all that sort of thing is just creating karma. Seeking Buddha and the Dharma just create karma that leads to hell. Seeking the bodhisattvas is creating karma too. Studying sutras and doctrines is creating karma too.
>
> (Linji Yixuan[6])

Note that in answering the soteriological question, Master Dazhu draws on the notion of karma. This kind of discourse is very common in the long tradition of Buddhist teaching. The Buddha himself distinguishes good and bad karma in terms of the relationship between deeds and volition, and between deeds and consequences. For example, he distinguishes "black" and "white," namely bad and good, karma in terms of the relation between deeds and consequences. Based on the same relation, he also proposes a category of "neither black nor white" deeds. These deeds, represented by the noble eightfold path, lead to the consumption of all past karma, without producing deleterious new karma, and thus ultimately lead to nirvana. Although they are called "neither black nor white," these deeds are, in my view, ultimately good, since they are characterized by selflessness and lead to nirvana.[7] Under these divisions of good and bad, black and white, the deeds included in the noble eightfold path—namely, intellectual understanding, discipline, meditation, cultivation, and purification—are obviously on the side of good karma or ultimate goodness. Conversely, the opposite side includes wrong views or wrong understanding, violation of discipline, impurity, and so on. The same line of division also separates karmic bondage and final freedom—the soteriological goal of Buddhism. The separation is clear-cut. In each pair, one is in sharp contrast with the other and the order cannot be reversed. These distinctions and categories are shared by almost all Buddhist schools, including Chan. Therefore, when Dazhu relates the final nirvana to overcoming the karma of birth and death, he refers to something with which Buddhists are very familiar.

However, Dazhu and other masters' further elaboration on karma defamiliarizes this traditional Buddhist theme. What was traditionally placed on the side of good karma or ultimate goodness is now instead seen as bad karma, deleterious to the final goal. In the eyes of these masters, purification, observing precepts, following the path, studying, devoting, seeking Buddha and the Dharma—all kinds of practices of Buddhism—are simply creating bad karma or the karma of birth and death. Even seeking the final goal—nirvana, realization of enlightenment, or verification of attainment—creates bad karma.

Linji regards this kind of karma as leading to hell, a place even non-Buddhists would like to avoid. Huangbo calls it the "karma of demons." Here the Chinese word "*mo* (demons)" designates evil spirits, or *Mara,* the embodiment of death, desire and the hindrance to enlightenment.[8] "*Moye* (karma of demons)" symbolizes all bad karmas. Thus, these Chan masters radically overturn or interrupt the traditional distinction and conceptual hierarchy of good and bad karma, the privileging of good karma over bad, and even the soteriological goal over karmic bondage.

Why should this kind of distinction be overturned? This question would lead us to investigate the nature, or, more accurately, the context, of the overturning. Generally speaking, it is the overturning of a reified or fixed distinction. When the Buddha makes those distinctions of good and bad karma and teaches the noble eightfold path, he bases these distinctions on practical situations and uses them to serve soteriological purposes. One of these purposes is to guide people, or get people on to the path. The Buddha must adapt himself to different people and different situations for that purpose. A meaning of this adaptation is to accommodate himself to the capacity of unenlightened people. For these unenlightened people and their capacity, the making of these distinctions and the establishment of means and goal are very necessary and can help them to understand his soteriological message. However, the Buddha is an enlightened one and holds an enlightened perspective in which he can clearly see the fluidity of situations, the possibility of sedimentation and attachments to these distinctions and teachings, and the need to overcome them. Therefore, he warns people about these things. One form of attachment, among others, is to reify these distinctions, making them into the closure of conceptual hierarchy, taking them out of evolving practical context, and separating them from all living connections. This reason, though not specific enough, explains why Nāgārjuna and Mādhyamika thinkers take pains to refute the concept of karma, agent and fruit, or cause and effect as self-existent or self-sufficient entities. The similar reification nonetheless happens repeatedly, despite the early struggles, and this time it happens in Chinese Chan Buddhism, although it takes a different form and arises in a different context.

A major element of this context is the inner struggle for a better understanding of Buddhist practice and its soteriological goal within Chinese Chan tradition. In line with Shenhui and Huineng, the Hongzhou masters strongly oppose Shenxiu's and his followers' tendency of "fixing the mind on contemplating purity, summoning the mind to contemplate the outside world, controlling the mind for inner cleanness," and so on.[9] On the surface, the Hongzhou masters seem to oppose emphasis on purity, detachment, discipline, and cultivation—concepts that the Buddha and his early followers have used for a long time. However, looking deeper, the Hongzhou masters are actually questioning whether Buddhists should privilege purity over impurity, motionlessness over motion, the true mind over the ordinary mind, the inside over the outside to such a degree as to isolate and separate practices of Buddhism from everyday activities and dynamic reality. Since the Hongzhou School rigorously maintains a relational, non-dualistic perspective of Buddhist practice and ordinary activity, as well as soteriological goal and the samsaric world, the Hongzhou masters can never agree on such privileging. Furthermore, the Hongzhou masters also disagree with Shenhui's mistake of equating enlightenment with intuitive awareness that is still isolatable from ordinary activities of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. As Huangbo points out:

> [Y]ou students of the *dao*…will realize your original mind only in the realm of seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing…. You should not simply start your cognitive maneuver from them, nor allow them to give rise to any conceptual thought; yet nor should you seek the mind apart from them or abandon them in your pursuit of the dharma.
>
> (*Chuanxin Fayao*, in *CJ* 13.8975a)[10]

Zongmi re-casts this Hongzhou position in a quite accurate form:

> *Dao* is the [ordinary] mind itself, and one cannot use the [Buddha] mind to cultivate the [ordinary] mind; evil is also the mind itself, and one cannot cut off the [evil] mind by means of the [other] mind. Do not cut and do not produce; letting the mind follow along with all circumstances and letting it be free, this is called liberation.
>
> (*Yuanjue Jing Dashuchao*, in *HTC* 14.279b)[11]

In this Hongzhou perspective, the original/Buddha mind, enlightenment, or practice of Buddhism can be separated from neither everyday activities or flowing circumstances, nor the ordinary mind or the samsaric world. While the Buddha has taught discipline and cultivation and distinguished between good and bad karma, the wholesome and unwholesome, the Hongzhou School does not take the Buddha's teaching to mean that enlightenment or practice of Buddhism is a dismissal of everyday existence or a flight to an enchanted, otherworldly reality. Upholding Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, the Hongzhou School believes that, with enlightened perspective, one experiences the life-world as interdependent arising and becomes a Buddha; with unenlightened perspective, the same person experiences the same world as ever-returning samsara and becomes a dissatisfactory being. The existential-practical transformation of the ordinary mind is the key to enlightenment and the central point of Buddhist practice.

However, this transformation cannot take place if a true mind must be separated from the ordinary mind. These two minds cannot be separated, not only because they are related as the contrast of enlightened and unenlightened, but also because they condition each other. In other words, the deluded mind and everyday activities are necessary conditions for enlightenment and Buddhist practice; without the former, the latter cannot exist. Therefore, the Hongzhou School understands and appropriates the *Dacheng Qixin Lun* teaching of one mind and two aspects (true/deluded) solely in terms of this relational and non-dualistic perspective. If this perspective transcends the isolation and separation between the true and deluded, the good and evil, it has right reasons to do so. Yet this kind of perspectival transcendence does not mean ignoring the ethical. Rather, it brings out the very condition of the possibilities of the ethical more thoroughly; it paves the way for the ethical by a trans-ethical opening of the ethical or by a trans-ethical ground of the ethical. Here we see the paradoxical, aporetical characteristic of the ethical: the ethical is contingent upon the non-ethical. What makes the ethical possible transcends the separation/distinction of the ethical and non-ethical.

The Hongzhou masters agree that the Buddha's teachings and his definitions of good/evil are all related to and function in this everyday world. Separating them from the dynamic world and everyday activities makes them into a kind of conceptual closure.

Apart from the transformation of the ordinary mind through everyday activities, no "good" deeds, disciplines, cultivations, understanding of teachings, or seeking of attainments would do any good for Buddhists. None of them deserve our pursuit, since they are all based on mental constructions or projections. They are reified, cut off from real connections. Primarily for this reason, Linji offers the following advice to his disciples:

> There is no Buddha, no Dharma, no training, and no realization. What are you so hotly chasing? Putting a head on top of your head, you blind fools? Your head is right where it should be…. Do not be deceived. If you turn to the outside, there is no Dharma; neither is there anything to be obtained from the inside.
>
> (*LY,* in *CJ* 11.7357a; Yanagida, 1972, 140–1)[12]

Linji essentially says that since these concepts of Buddha, dharma, training, and realization are all mental constructions or projections, they do not lead people to any final liberation. Rather, they are "the hindrance to Buddhahood," as Huangbo says. "Since they obstruct your mind, you are fettered by cause and effect and have no freedom of either going or staying."[13] Like all other attachments, they only create bad karma. In terms of this analysis, what people ordinarily consider as good karma has unmistakably turned out to be bad. The analysis clarifies why the reified and privileged concepts of good karma, discipline, cultivation, and realization—including all reified concepts of Buddhist goals and practices—must be overturned. The suspension of these fixed distinctions aims exactly at de-reification and detachment. The overturning is a deconstructive strategy used by the masters to shock people away from these mental constructions and to free their minds from the entanglements caused by these concepts. Comparing people who attach themselves to these mental constructions and think they are taking right actions, Linji declares: "The Buddhas and patriarchs are people who do nothing [like these]."[14]

III The ethical consequence of deconstruction: wearing out karma merely according to conditions as they are

The Hongzhou School's radical overturning of the distinction between good and bad karma, and its emphasis on the non-duality of the true and deluded, good and evil, can conceivably arouse some critical concerns and questions. Despite the above analysis of Hongzhou's deconstruction, I still face questions such as the following: Does the Hongzhou School advocate a soteriology without its own ethic? Are these masters indifferent toward, or little concerned with, the ethical in their practice of Chan? Are moral discipline and cultivation completely neglected by these masters? If Hongzhou's radical deconstruction of karma still concerns the ethical, what are the ethical consequences to this deconstruction, if any?

Similar questions have been raised both in history and in contemporary academia.[15] Historically, criticisms of Hongzhou Chan not only come from outside sources, such as the Neo-Confucianists, but also from sources within the Chan tradition. Take, for example, Zongmi's formulations on the Hongzhou position. As he puts it, "[T]he

blackness itself is the bright pearl, and the substance of the bright pearl is ever invisible. If one wants to know the pearl, blackness itself is brightness" (*Zhonghua Chuanxindi Chanmen Shizi Chengxitu*, in *HTC* 110.436d; Kamata, 1971, 326).[16] The accusation here points to Hongzhou's claim that all everyday activities, including affliction and evil, are the manifestation of Buddha nature or true suchness, and hence to what Zongmi believes to be the mistake of mixing right and wrong, good and evil. The fundamental point of Hongzhou's claim, as I have stated, lies in the belief that we should neither isolate and separate the categories of enlightened/unenlightened, true/deluded, good/evil from each other; nor should we privilege the former over the latter. This kind of privileging goes against Hongzhou's relational and non-dualistic perspective and ultimately pulls Buddhist practice out of the everyday world. For Hongzhou, this is none other than denying the condition of the possibilities of the ethical. However, in the aforementioned quote, Zongmi believes that Hongzhou mixes the enlightened/unenlightened, white/black, good/evil and therefore runs the risk of canceling out the entire Buddhist practice. This accusation and misunderstanding reminds us that unless we offer convincing answers to these critical questions, the Hongzhou position will not be properly understood.

A clear and relatively simple answer to our inquiry is that no matter how radical they are in deconstructing the reified concept of good/bad karma, the Hongzhou masters never intend to deny karma or the causal chain itself. Nor do they neglect the importance of moral cultivation and discipline. Mazu Daoyi's following statement demonstrates this point very clearly:

> Not cultivating and not sitting is the *tathāgata's* pure meditation. If you now truly understand the real meaning of this, then do not create any karma. According to your opportunity, pass your life. One bowl, one robe; whether sitting or standing, it is always with you. Complying with morality and increasing purifying influence, you accumulate pure karma. If you can be like this, how can there be any worry that you will not attain [your goal]?
>
> (*HTC* 119.407a)[17]

Note that this statement is made at the end of a sermon Mazu delivers to his disciples. Mazu's sermons are famous for his radical overturning of various fixed distinctions. In this sermon, he deconstructs the conventional distinctions between the ordinary mind and Buddha mind, between right and wrong, grasping and abandoning, termination and permanence, worldly and holy, cultivation and non-cultivation, sitting meditation and non-sitting, and so on (*HTC* 119.406a–407a). To our surprise, however, at the end of this sermon, Mazu returns from his de-familiarization to the familiar theme of good karma: he advises his disciples to comply with morality, increase purifying influence, and accumulate pure karma. This advice plainly reveals that the Hongzhou School's deconstruction of the conceptual hierarchy of good and bad karma neither abolishes the Buddha's teaching of karma nor neglects the ethical dimension of Buddhism. It rather, in my view, reinforces the ethical dimension and the practice of morality in a unique and very profound way. However, to see this point more clearly and to understand how it could happen, I need first to offer a more detailed examination of related Hongzhou thought and then find the underlying consistency between the Hongzhou School's radical

deconstruction and its return to morality, despite the seeming contradiction between them.

I think the key to this consistency lies in the Hongzhou masters' thesis that Chan Buddhists should wear out karma merely according to conditions as they are. Central to this thesis are the Hongzhou notions of "the ordinary mind is the *dao (pingchangxin shi dao),*" "follow along with the movement of all things *(renyun),*" and "follow conditions as they are *(suiyuan).*"

Mazu's well-known dictum "the ordinary mind is the *dao*" underlies his overturning of all fixed distinctions and anticipates his return to morality in everyday situations. As he explicates, the "ordinary mind," on one hand, is a deconstructive mind that privileges neither right nor wrong, neither grasping nor abandoning, neither ordinary nor holy, and so on; it is non-clinging, non-abiding, and free-flowing. This mind practices the middle way and the bodhisattva path that neither attaches to nor abandons this world. Since the mind has overcome attachment, the person does not do or seek anything special to separate living situations and Buddhist practices. On the other hand, because the person does nothing special, he or she is able to understand that "just like now, whether walking, standing, sitting, reclining, responding to situations or handling things for people, all is the *dao*" (*HTC* 119.406a).[18] In other words, everyday concrete activities and situations are for the Chan master the necessary and ineluctable conditions for both the attainment and verification of enlightenment. Based on this understanding, the master lives a simple life, "one bowl, one robe; whether sitting or standing, it is always with you." Essentially, he or she is just an ordinary person doing ordinary tasks. The only difference between the ordinary person and the Chan master is that while the Chan master eats, sleeps, moves, or rests like any other ordinary person, he or she does these actions with an attitude or mind of non-attachment, and this attitude or mind always works throughout his or her life.

These two aspects in Mazu's notion of "the ordinary mind is the *dao*" clearly show the intrinsic link between a deconstructive mind and the practice of Buddhism in the everyday world. With the mind attached to mental constructions, one isolates and separates Buddhist practice and enlightenment from everyday activities, which ultimately leads to creating more bad karma. With the mind of non-clinging and de-reifying, one practices Buddhism and realizes enlightenment in all everyday situations. Mazu indicates that only in the latter sense can one really stop "creating bad karma," and instead "accumulate pure karma" and attain the final goal. The everyday world and its activities are the only realm in which morality as part of the soteriological path makes sense and becomes indispensable. Thus acknowledging that "the ordinary mind is the *dao*" inevitably leads to also acknowledging that morality or discipline in everyday situations is the *dao*. As one may ask, how can one "respond to situations" and "handle things for people" without involving morality? Without moral practice, how can one get on to the path and be led to the final liberation, since the realization of interdependent arising and emptiness itself involves profound ethical significance? Although this profound ethicality of enlightened perspective is not reducible to ethical norms or rules—an issue to which I shall soon return—the ethical dimension or concern is internal to Buddhist teaching and Chan spirituality. I think Mazu deeply understands these intrinsic connections among the Buddhist soteriological goal, everyday activity, morality, and de-reification. Therefore, after deconstructing the reified concept of good and bad karma, it is just a very logical move for Mazu to re-emphasize the importance of karma in a right fashion.

This right fashion is also embodied in the way in which Hongzhou masters relate their discourse of karma to the notions of *renyun* and *suiyuan*. The dynamic nature of Mazu's notion of "the ordinary mind is the *dao*" is further highlighted by these two notions. In Chinese Chan vocabulary, *renyun* is a classical term. According to recorded sayings, Hongzhou masters—especially Mazu, Huangbo, and Linji—are among those earliest users.[19] The basic meaning of *renyun*, as emphasized by the Hongzhou masters, is to flow together with ever-changing things or circumstances in everyday existence. The term expresses the central motif that underlies all of Hongzhou's deconstruction of conceptual hierarchies. The masters profoundly understand that the living process of change and flux ruthlessly undercuts every fixed position and every attachment to self or self-identity without ever stopping. Reality itself is flowing and deconstructing. Enlightenment can neither occur nor last *outside* this flow. Enlightenment is nothing but being harmonious with change and flux. An enlightened person would find inexhaustible wonders in living in harmony with change and flux.

Close to the term *renyun* and almost as its synonym is the term *suiyuan*. *Suiyuan* does not exclusively belong to Chinese Chan vocabulary; it was taken from Huayan terminology, especially Fazang's interpretation of the *Dacheng Qixin Lun* and the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition. Fazang characterizes the two aspects of the mind, the mind as true suchness *(xin zhenru)* and the mind subject to samsara *(xin shengmie)*, as *bubian* and *suiyuan*. The term *bubian* involves the meaning of non-changing or permanence *(chang)*. However, this permanence designates the constancy and infiniteness of impermanence itself, the perpetuality of change and lack of self-nature of all things (*Huayan Yicheng Jiaoyi Fenqizhang*, in *T* 45.1866.500b). It is a perspective on the condition of possibilities of all things. Although this overall condition is considered beyond the categories of being and non-being, it is also understood as involving the virtue *(de)* of becoming or letting things be (*ibid.*, 499c). Since the *bubian* is understood as letting things be, it is non-dualistic from the conditioned arising of all things, just as the two aspects of the mind are inseparable from each other. The Chinese character *sui* involves the meaning of "to follow," "to let," or "to be along with." The term *suiyuan* thus means "to follow conditions," "to be along with conditions," or "to act according to conditions." The two aspects are none other than the conditionality of the world and the conditioned phenomena of the world.

The Hongzhou question is how we can realize this conditionality *(bubian)* apart from, if not along with, the conditioned phenomena of the everyday world *(suiyuan)*. When the Heze (Shenhui-Zongmi) School takes Fazang's interpretation one step further by emphasizing the mind of true suchness independent of all conditioned phenomena *(bujia yuanqi)*, the step moves toward another conceptual closure (*Nanyang Heshang Wenda Zazhengyi*, in *Shenhui Heshang Chanhua Lu*, 67). The Heze School establishes a new conceptual hierarchy of privileging "the intrinsic/self functioning of the self [empty] nature *(zixin benyong)*" over "the responsive functioning in accord with conditions *(suiyuan yingyong)*."[20] In a word, it privileges the aspect of *bubian* over the aspect of *suiyuan*. The result of this privileging the mind of true suchness independent of all conditioned phenomena is that for Heze, the mind of true suchness becomes isolatable from the everyday activities of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, and therefore becomes isolatable from the ordinary mind. The Hongzhou masters do not deny the aspect of *bubian* as the constancy of impermanence and conditionality; nor do they

utterly negate the distinction between the realized conditionality and the unrealized conditioning. However, reacting to Heze's and others' privileging of the *bubian,* the Hongzhou masters highlight the necessity of *suiyuan* to rectify Chan practitioners. Together with the notion of *renyun,* the masters' emphasis on the *suiyuan* most explicitly conveys the Hongzhou point that there is no way to realize the conditionality, emptiness, or true mind apart from conditioned phenomena, events, and activities of the everyday world. As Dazhu Huihai points out, although the true mind is distinguished from conditioned activities such as speech, in reality there is no mind apart from these conditioned activities *(yuan)* (*T* 51.2076.444a).[21] This Hongzhou position forcefully defends the inseparableness of the two aspects by maintaining the conditioned world as the prerequisite and only ground, and thereby dismantling any mental projection of metaphysical flight.

It is precisely from this position that the Hongzhou masters come to express an important opinion about karma: one should wear out karma, or increase pure karma, merely according to conditions as they are. Huangbo conveys this opinion very clearly:

> According harmoniously with the conditions of your present lives, you should go on, as opportunities arise, reducing the store of old karma laid up in previous lives *(suiyuan xiaojiuye);* and above all…avoid building up a fresh store of retribution for yourselves *(gengmo zaoxinyang)*!
>
> (Blofeld, 1958, 91–2)

Linji expresses the same notion in a similar vein, and his words have become very well known:

> Merely according to circumstances as they are, be able to use up your past karma *(danneng suiyuan xiaojiuye);* following along with [the change of] circumstances, put on your [different] clothes *(renyun zhuyishang).* If you need to walk, just walk. If you need to sit, just sit. But never for a moment set your mind on seeking Buddha-hood.
>
> (*LY* in *CJ* 11.7351a; Yanagida, 1972, 79)[22]

Mazu's teachings on complying with morality and accumulating pure karma, as quoted earlier, convey the same message. In his sermon, Mazu's advice comes right after the instruction that one should pass one's life according to one's opportunity. This instruction amounts to his saying: "following along with the movement of all circumstances, live out one's time *(renyun guoshi)*" (*Jingde Chuandeng Lu,* fascicle 6, *T* 51.2076.246a). Obviously, he is advising that, as part of one's everyday life, one should practice morality according to shifting conditions as they are.

This common teaching of practicing morality in accordance with everyday conditions or situations is ethically significant and demonstrates the profundity and distinctiveness of the ethical dimension of Hongzhou Chan. Although these masters themselves do not elaborate on this dimension, I offer here an analysis of its significance and implications.

First, the relational and non-dualistic perspective, in terms of which the masters maintain the inseparableness of the *bubian* and *suiyuan* and attempt to pull moral cultivation back to everyday existential situations, is the same perspective of

interdependent arising and lack of self-nature (emptiness). Although this perspective itself does not provide straightforward norms and standards for moral judgment, this view is more fundamentally ethical than any available ethical rules. On one hand, it addresses the condition of the possibilities of the ethical, reminding Buddhists of what makes the ethical possible, and what conditions the good and the right in human existence and human actions. To understand and realize this condition, this larger context, it is necessary to look beyond temporary distinctions of good and evil or right and wrong. This transcendence beyond distinctions may look like the non-ethical or the lack of the ethical, but it is precisely this non-ethical or this lack of the ethical that opens to the ethical and paves the way for it. Therefore I characterize it as trans-ethical or para-ethical in the sense that it plays at the boundary of the ethical, at the borderline between the ethical and non-ethical, but nonetheless connects the non-ethical and ethical.

On the other hand, if ethic is understood more broadly and more fundamentally as *ethos*, as dwelling place, or as the larger context of being-in-the-world and being-with-others, not merely as available procedures or norms, then, the ethical dimension of interdependent arising or emptiness becomes very visible. Only when a person fully understands and realizes this basic context/condition of interdependent arising can he or she be fully responsive to, responsible for, and compassionate for others. It is in this sense that I think the ethical dimension is internal to Buddhist teaching and Chan spirituality. This dimension also explains why wisdom and morality must not be separated, especially in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition.

Second, although this teaching on practicing morality in accordance with shifting conditions is tinged with Daoist spirit, especially Zhuangzi's notion of flowing *dao*, it corresponds with the Buddha's teaching of impermanence and his advice about avoiding attachments to moral rules. As Kalupahana correctly observes, the Buddha allows the accommodation of moral principles and rules to changing circumstances and new situations. In the Buddha's view, moral values or principles are subject to impermanence and to interdependent arising (Kalupahana, 1995, 90–5).[23] In this regard, the Hongzhou teaching signifies a remarkable return to the Buddha's view, although it is presented in a Chinese context and with Chinese characteristics. The teaching demonstrates these Chan masters' great insight into the limits of moral norms or rules. Placing them in ever-shifting circumstances and situations, the masters see these moral norms and rules as nothing but contemporary configurations contingent upon infinitely interactive, interdependent factors and conditions. No norm or rule can ever be above and prior to the flowing reality of concrete, everyday existence. Rather, these rules and norms are the products of these flowing conditions or circumstances. Too often, however, these norms or rules have become the obstacle and blockage to the free flow of our lives and the opening to changing situations after they are produced in terms of the conditions.

Thus the Hongzhou position is neither moral relativism nor anarchism, neither antinomian nor amoral. Rather, it is a position that takes the limits of moral norms and rules seriously. It is to go with the flow, which means to recognize the limits, to detach one from the naive embellishment of and fixation on the norms and rules. This unique ethical dimension better serves the ethical by exposing the intrinsic limit or inadequacy of the ethical in terms of the larger context or process of human existence. What it offers is definitely more than what Whitehill has observed: that Chan Buddhists lack ethics and only occasionally demonstrate moral courage, noble self-discipline, empathic compassion

or continuous reliance on general Buddhist precepts (Whitehill, 1987, 9–10). Its ethic is aporetic and unusual but more profound than, if not canceling out, normative ethics, since it provides a foundationless foundation for such ethics.

Accordingly, no one can accuse these Chan masters of loftily transcending morality. If they seem to demonstrate a sort of transcendence, it is not transcendence over morality, but transcendence of and within morality, just as it is transcendence of and within immanence—a unique contribution of Chinese thought. In other words, morality is not transcended by an otherworldly state of being that the masters have attained. Through relocating morality in everyday flowing reality, morality itself is conceived of as an ever-evolving process of human moral concerns and decisions in an equally evolving existential context, with numerous unexpected and unpredictable situations. Every moral norm or rule is limited by the condition out of which it arises. Changing conditions call for adjusting human morality, revising the original moral norm or rule, and replacing the old limit with a new one. No norm or rule can ever fit in with all conditions or situations. Thus, as infinite process, morality brings out its own transcendence within itself. Moreover, even right after a new norm or rule is established, it immediately faces a movement into concrete practice, a filling out, giving flesh and blood and detail to what initially began as a merely vague and general idea. In any case, the Chan masters have every reason to emphasize practicing morality according to shifting conditions or circumstances.

Third, this teaching on practicing morality according to shifting conditions not only indicates the motif of the Hongzhou deconstruction of karma, but also shows the ethical consequence of this deconstruction. The consequence is very clear: after deconstruction, one simply returns to morality in this everyday world of good and evil, right and wrong, back to one's business of "responding to situations" and "handling things for people," with a better-equipped mind of detachment and de-reification. With this mind, one can practice morality in the following ways. First, since the categories of good and bad karma, right and wrong deeds, and the distinction of Buddhist practice and conventional existence are no longer conceived of as separate, isolated from each other and fixed, but rather as mutually conditioned, relational, and interchangeable, one would no longer need to designate any special moment, place, or procedure, disconnected from ordinary living, for practicing Buddhism or seeking Buddha-hood. In this manner, one can avoid turning so-called good karma into bad by detaching one from the former.

Second, since one pays careful attention to shifting conditions and circumstances and to the limits of moral norms and rules, one can be sensitive in one's moral judgment to the singular situation of any individual or group. One can be more flexible and active concerning the revision of norms and rules and become "less apt to apply labels rigidly to people and events, which implies less self-righteousness and condemnation of others" (Ives, 1992, 50). One can be more willing to "move critically away from certain arbitrary or socially determined delineations of good or evil that do not support emancipation in its various senses," and to "rid oneself of destructive bias, whether personal, ethnic, class, national, or anthropocentric" *(ibid.)*. In my view, all these practices are authentic ways of wearing out one's past karma and increasing pure karma, which are implied in the Hongzhou teaching of practicing morality according to conditions. Only by following this

teaching can a Chan Buddhist effectively make use of moral concepts/ distinctions and norms/rules in ever-renewing soteriological practices without falling prey to human fixation and damaging Chan's fundamental ethicality.

Glossary

benzhi zhiyong 本智之用
bubian 不變
bujia yuanqi 不假緣起
chang 常
Chuanxin Fayao 傳心法要
Dacheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論
Dazhu Huihai 大珠慧海
danneng suiyuan xiaojiuye 但能隨緣消舊業
de 德
Fazang 法藏
gengmo zaoxinyang 更莫造新殃
Heze 荷澤
Hongzhou 洪州
Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運
Huayan Yicheng Jiaoyi Fenqizhang 華嚴一乘教義分齊章
Huineng 慧能
Jingde Chuandeng Lu 景德傳燈錄
Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄
Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一
mo 魔
moye 魔業
Nanyang Heshang Wenda Zazhengyi 南陽和尚問答雜徵義
pingchangxin shi dao 平常心是道
renyun 任運
renyun guoshi 任運過時
renyun zhuyishang 任運著衣裳
Shenhui 神會
Shenxiu 神秀
suiyuan 隨緣
suiyuan yingyong 隨緣應用
suiyuan xiaojiuye 隨緣消舊業
xin shengmie 心生滅
xin zhenru 心真如
yuan 緣

Yuanjue Jing Dashuchao 圓覺經大疏鈔
zixing benyong 自性本用
Zhonghua Chuanxindi Chanmen Shizi Chengxitu 中華傳心地禪門師資承襲圖
Zongmi 宗密

Notes

1 For contemporary discussions of the ethic of deconstruction or the relationship between deconstruction and the ethical, see Critchley, 1999; Cornell, 1992; Caputo, 1993 and 2000; and Bennington, 2000. For a critique of the ethic of deconstruction and an alternative view to this postmodern ethic, see also Bourgeois, 2001.
2 The only recent and noticeable article theoretically exploring the theme of the Chinese Buddhist understanding of karma is Yun-hua Jan's "The Chinese understanding and assimilation of karma doctrine," 1986, which involves Zongmi's important Chan discourse of karma. However, my examination of the Chinese Chan discourse on karma in terms of contemporary philosophical insights is able to contribute something that the previous examination was unable to discover.
3 See, for example, the *Heart Sutra,* in Conze, 1958:97; Nāgārjuna's *Kārikā,* chs. 1 and 17, in Garfield, 1995, 103–23, 231–44. For a more recent recount of Nāgārjuna's position on cause/effect, agent/fruit, also see Lusthaus, 2002, 200–13.
4 Cf. Blofeld, 1962, 63.
5 Cf. Blofeld, 1958, 91.
6 Cf. Watson, 1993, 43.
7 See Mitchell, 1987, 72–3; McDermott, 1980, 180–1.
8 See *Ci Hai,* Vol. of Vocabulary, 2275.
9 Cf. Watson, 1993, 43.
10 Cf. Ui, 1990, 14–16. Also cf. Blofeld, 1958, 36–7.
11 For the English translation, cf. Jan, 1972, 47.
12 Also see Schloegl, 1976, 44–5. Cf. Watson, 1993, 53.
13 Cf. Blofeld, 1958, 91.
14 Cf. Watson, 1993, 43.
15 For the contemporary questioning of Zen ethic and its related discussions, see Whitehill, 1987, 9–18; James, 2004, ch. 2, "Zen Ethics?"; Ives, 1992, chs. 2–4.
16 For the English translation, see Jan, 1972, 52.
17 For the English translation, see Cheng, 1992, 68. I have made some changes.
18 Cf. *ibid.*, 65.
19 For a more detailed discussion of the Hongzhou masters' use of the term *renyun,* see Wang, 2003, 77.
20 See Gregory, 1991, 239; Wang, 2003, 74.
21 Cf. Blofeld, 1962, 96.
22 Cf. Watson, 1993, 26; Sasaki, 1975, 9–10.
23 Also cf. Harvey, 2000, 93, about how the Buddha makes a rule according to particular situations.

5
THE ETHICS OF BEING AND NON-BEING

Confucian contestations on human nature *(xing)* in late imperial China

On-cho Ng

Ethics presumes the substantiality of a self that possesses a putative nature *(xing),* which, in Confucian terms, is more than a philosophical problem of academic, anthropological interest. Confucian conceptions of human nature are brought to bear on questions of transcendence and ultimacy, such that *xing* may be conceived as the whole of reality, as well as the wellspring of varied manifestations of the deliberatively acting and critically thinking self. In the words of Mou Zongsan, "*xing* is that which flows down from the reality mandated by heaven and is fully embodied in the self" (Mou, 1968, 31). For Mou, *xing,* fully encapsulated in the self and enlivened with moral-ethical instincts and impulses, encompasses the whole of the cosmos. To the extent that "nothing is outside of the 'reality of the self's nature' *(xingti),* the cosmic order is the moral-ethical order; the moral-ethical order is the cosmic order" (*ibid.,* 37). This ontological interlarding of the self and the cosmos (and the interpenetration of the natural and the moral-ethical), unique to the Chinese way of thinking about the individual and greater reality, cannot be adequately represented by such Western terms as "nature," "essence," "substance," "being," or "reality," which do not quite capture the meaning and import of the self as the "morally creative reality." The neologism of "*xingti*" (the reality of the self's nature) is confected precisely to connote the creative ontological quintessence that inheres in the individual self (*ibid.*, 21–41).[1]

Mou Zongsan, in so conceptualizing the substantial being of the self, gives a contemporary voice to the age-old Confucian faith in nature's innate goodness. It is faith insofar as it is not a provisional belief in (or representation of) reality, but the lived engagement with ultimate reality. And as faith, thinking about *xing* has an inexorable tautological quality, in that its discourse is an instantiation of its meaning, which in turn substantiates the very discourse that discursively defines it. Faith generates the very realities that it ponders, not as subjective, ephemeral autosuggestions, but as objective, enduring truths that others can share. To put it another way, to talk about the self is to articulate and reflect on what it already is and what it already knows.[2] In this fundamental sense, knowing must be acting. Knowledge of *xing* simultaneously involves the cultivation of nature so that it is thoroughly humanized—in full empathy with others—and cosmologized—in complete tune with nature.[3] If the epistemological condition of knowing is the experiential realization of the ontological fact of our *xing,* then misconception of *xing* is a distortion of reality and corruption of truth. To wit, an ethical failure.

Indeed, it was in light of such ethical failure that the late Ming (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries) expositions of *xing's* transcendence of good and evil *(wushan*

wu'e) by Wang Yangming and his epigones were viewed by many Confucian literati. For these Confucian critics, misconstrual of human nature bred moral-ethical declension, which must be arrested by the reassertion of the faith in the supreme value of *xing* as the innately good reality of moral creativity. But how are we, supposed postmodern beings, who have been much bombarded by such proclamations as "the death of man," "the death of the author," "the silencing of voice," and "the deconstruction of the subject," to treat the late imperial Chinese ontological notion of "beyond good and evil" and the experiential indeterminacy that it apparently engenders? Unlike the Confucians of yore who reacted with quaking anger and deeply felt anxiety, may we not view it with a measure of comfort, given the bruised idealism and vitiated certitude of modernity? Is our wounded modernist sensibility not somewhat soothed by the resonant late Ming pronouncement that access to transcendence begins with the dismantling of the conventional sense of good and evil? Is it not a demiurgic agent, from a past and parallel universe, of our own postmodern/ deconstructionist ethics? Answering these questions requires a judicious examination of the intellectual histories of late imperial China and the recent West, and the philosophical ideas therein. It is by casting the Chinese debate in the comparative light of seemingly contemporary Western terms that we, understandably laden with modern/postmodern assumptions and equipped with provincial conceptual tools and analytic vocabularies, may come to understand the Confucian views of the self and its nature.

Let us begin with our parochial, Western way of thinking about the self and its ethical agency. In the modern West since the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century, the notion of the radically independent self has been a monumental bedrock of philosophical thinking, as the rise of historical consciousness destabilized and demolished the preexisting mythical frameworks, releasing humanity from the trammels of the natural cosmic cycle and the social communal setting to which it was tied. The self became a singularly autonomous individual whose agency governed one's own decisions and endeavors. The Cartesian project prizes the central conception of the "thinking substance" *(ego cogitans)* and affirms the authority of the interiorized human subject and its thinking substance. What underpins Descartes' dictum of "I think, therefore I am" is the conviction in one's capacity to discover truth outside of the ambit of tradition and community by appealing directly to one's innermost illumination, the subjective truth of which is certain, inasmuch as one's mental experiences undeniably confirm one's existence (Ng, 2003, 37–61; Stout, 1981, 37–50). Human incertitude and finitude notwithstanding, the *cogito* can be universally ascertained. The Cartesian "self-knowledge" based on "meditation" is not the exclusive property of anyone; it is, much like mathematics, the model of all science, conditioned by nothing save the incontrovertible test of clarity and distinctiveness (Scharff, 2002, 33). In Descartes' words: "Concerning objects proposed for study, we ought to investigate what we can clearly and evidently intuit or deduce with certainty, and not what other people have thought or what we ourselves conjecture. For knowledge can be attained in no other way" (1985, 13). Thus, what is wrought in the modern West as a result of the Cartesian "project of pure inquiry," to borrow Bernard Williams' description (Williams, 1978, book title), is a substance-theory of the self based on the conception of the transparency of rational mind as a sort of mental mirror that veridically reflects reality. Kant's dicta of *a priori* principles and categories reinforce the autonomy of the moral self and strengthen

the notion of the distinct individuality of the singular, integral, unified, and universal self (Schrag, 1997, 4–9; Dallmayr, 2002, 130–1; Gusdorf, 1980, 31–4; Kepnes, 1992, 107–9).

Such metaphysics of an august self of reason generates a sort of ethics that is robustly based on normative moral principles, to the extent that the authoritative self's conscience is the wellspring of moral inclinations that rationally guide and mandate conduct. Hence Kant's premising his deontological ethics on the absolutely and unconditionally good will of an ethical subject, on which the categorical imperative bestowed universality, such that an ethical subject should "act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (quoted in Wang, 2005, 6). This axiom, as the categorical imperative, while not a logically allowed claim in that it has neither the need nor offers the possibility for proof, is nevertheless rationally derived. For Kant, it is soundly grounded on the fact of reason, that is, the fact that the ethical subject is fully aware of the categorical imperative as the intrinsic moral mandate or conscience.

As is well known, this modern self of rational and ethical plenitude, unified across time and space, has been viewed with suspicion, justifiably assailed and appropriately deconstructed. For in the last analysis, the Cartesian-Kantian self is a decontextualized abstraction that elides the circumstances and exigencies in which practical knowledge is produced and accrues. It engenders jejune theorizing, instrumental rationality, and disembodied knowledge, whose rigor and exactitude nonetheless yield no tangible practical concern for the concrete expressions and dimensions of workaday human life. By appealing to the subjective illumination of the knowing subject whose privileged space is the space of insularity, the ethical claims issuing from this knowing self seek to occupy the normative heights of universality and absolutism. Such a conception of charismatic selfhood (in the sense of individual subjectivity), with its rationally substantive nature, smacks at best of provincial conceit and solipsism, and breeds at worst hegemonic obliteration of the Other (Schrag, 1997, 4–9). Small wonder then that the modernist, essentialist conception of the heroic, monumental, and talismanic self has been revised and mitigated, such that with postmodern deconstruction, the self's substantive being and coherence have given way to its momentary becoming, open-endedness, ephemerality, liminality, and incompleteness, thus opening up, as Merleau-Ponty was wont to say, *"la possibilité de la philosophic."* This post-foundationalist and non-essentialist self chafes at the notions of its singularity, homogeneity, sameness, being, and surety of origin and purpose. Instead, it embraces sober relativism, submitting to the historically contingent and circumstantially expedient.

To so reconceive the self is to write its way out of the modern master metaphysical narrative of the knowing subject as the locus of objective, transcendent, and unconditioned truth. It is in that sense that Foucault famously declares "the death of man" and Barthes "the death of the author," because the self—the one doing the writing or the one that is being written—necessarily disappears into the words and texts whose import and purport can only be contextually construed, as authorly intents and readerly interpretations interplay and interpenetrate to generate ever-becoming and ever-changing meanings and truths (Foucault, 1977, 116; Barthes, 1977, 142–5; Kepnes, 1992, 112). The deconstructionist critique and reformulation owe much to Levinas's refashioning of the self in terms of its ineluctable intrication with the Other. The self as the knowing subject, with its ego and self-consciousness, represents and signifies no ontological plenitude in itself. This self, or the "Same" in Platonic terms, cannot domesticate the

Other by reducing its alienness and differentness, to the extent that the alterity of the Other cannot be co-opted by the self's rational power into its domain of knowledge and habitat. Instead, the alterity of the Other is the inescapable existential condition with which the self must live. Thus the self cannot be self-referential but is defined with reference to the world in which it is situated. Levinas rebels against the Western philosophic preoccupation with the ontological question of Being, which, for him, amounts to flattening out the complexity of all manner of otherness and transforming it into the Same. To so refurbish the notion of the self in relation to the Other is to embark on an ethical act, which is the launching of a critique that questions the fundamental tenability of an ontology of the self as the knowing subject that readily internalizes and domesticates what is other than one's self.

The constructive side of this critique is an ethics that sees inter-human relationship as the very cornerstone of the self. The knowing subject has no other way of justifying its being than accepting and subscribing fully to the irreducibility and undeniability of the other (Critchley, 1999, 4–9). In short, Levinas's contribution to the postmodern construal of the self lies in his severing the self from its moorage to ontological plenitude and rational self-sufficiency, and situating it in the englobing world of the other and otherness. Indeed the doyen of deconstructionism, Derrida, despite his deliberate avoidance of direct engagement with ethics because of its traditional genealogical link with the totalizing ontologies of being and dialectics, embraces the primacy of ethics in the Levinasian sense that it "always signifies the fact of the encounter, of the relation of myself with the Other: a scission of Being in the encounter—without coincidence!" (quoted in *ibid.,* 17). This "ultra-ethics," as Derrida dubs it, exceeds the bounds of traditional ethics by positing ethical possibilities solely in terms of the demands of, and the obligations and responsibility owed to, the singularly monumental Other, even as such ethics will be first and foremost realized in the domain of reading (*ibid.,* 18).

Inevitably, in turn, this postmodern critique of the modern self and its ethical implications have elicited critique. To many a critic, with the postmodern apotheosis of the Other and the concomitant celebration of multiplicity, heterogeneity, dispersal, contingency, relativism, and dissemination, we are left with a self that is ethically too diffuse and vitiated to shoulder the ethical responsibility of actual engagement in social, political, and economic terms. Apart from critically engaging the world as textual discourse, is the self, as subject, capable of knowing anything at all, especially anything that is substantive, enduring, and universal? Bereft of truth, origin, and goal, is there still the viable possibility of a philosophical critique of that which is, namely, being and reality? With an effaced self and magnified Other, does one still have a firm standpoint on which to initiate any sure-handed critique or effect social amelioration? Are we condemned to having only local, piecemeal knowledge? Short of the adjudication of strong reason, is every act by dint aesthetic, personal (while being other-centric), and hardly anything else? If there are no longer any culturally universal and foundationally truthful criteria to corroborate the tenability of claims about truth (what is) and value (what ought to be), what then are the practical alternatives and substitutes for any rationally cogent philosophical exposition with explanatory, and hence persuasive, power?

This synoptic account of the alleged flaws of the postmodern conceptions of selfhood is couched in the interrogative to suggest that they may not be repudiated wholesale (cf.

Schrag, 1992; Madison, 1988). While the deconstructionist conceptions should be questioned and interrogated, its merits should be acknowledged. To begin with, metaphysically speaking, it frees us from the illusion of context-transcending universalism; it debunks the Cartesian myth of the free-floating knowing subject as the progenitor of unconditioned truth; it explodes the paradigm of univocal being and truth to highlight the polysemic nature of local existences and verities; it rends asunder the self-constituted, autonomous self and replaces it with an heteronomous one circumscribed by historical contingencies and specificities. In the process of redefining the self and others in metaphysical and aesthetic terms, it sheds light on the very practical problems of ideological hegemony, social hierarchy, political domination, and economic inequity.

This small piece of recent Western intellectual history furnishes a ground for cross-cultural comparison, on which we may undertake a contemporary reading of the late sixteenth-century Chinese Confucian contestations over the question of selfhood in terms of human nature *(xing),* as it resonates with our own seemingly perennial philosophical concern with being. It is significant to note that on the Chinese side of things philosophical, there is really no direct equivalent of the Western notion of self. The characters *"zi"* and *"ji"* can certainly be translated as the "self"—and the compound term *"ziji"* as "one's self"—but they do not constitute a technically substantive nomenclature that throws philosophical light on the anthropological conceptions of the human being. Thus, in varying contexts, Chinese selfhood has to be apprehended and understood in terms of the notions of the mind-heart *(xin),* substance *(ti),* body (*shen* and/or *ti*), and especially nature *(xing).*[4]

The two highly publicized debates in the late Ming—Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) versus Xu Fuyuan (1535–1604), and Gu Xiancheng (1550–1612) versus Guan Zhidao (1536–1608)—pitted the assertion of *xing* as being beyond good and evil against that of the intrinsic goodness of *xing*. The first debate between Zhou Rudeng and Xu Fuyuan, recorded in Huang Zongxi's (1610–95) *Mingru xue'an (Intellectual Records of the Ming Scholars),* erupted in 1592 in Nanjing in the midst of a series of meetings of many illustrious scholars (Huang, 1985, 861–8). Zhou expounded on the thesis of *Verifying the Way in Tianquan (Tianquan zhengdao)* by one of Wang Yangming's disciples, Wang Ji (1498–1583): the thesis that the self's being was beyond good and evil. As a rebuttal, Xu wrote the "Nine Scrutinies" *(Jiudi)* that targeted the nine flaws in Wang Ji's philosophy and concluded that nature was innately good. This prompted Zhou's counter-rebuttal, an essay entitled "Nine Explanations" *(Jiujie)*. Their exchange sparked vociferous discussions among the scholars on the central ideas of being (Huang, 1985, 854–5, 861, 975–6; Huang, 1987, 199–201, 204–6).

Xu's "Scrutinies" of *xing* begin with an appeal to classical authority, arguing that as all the classics affirm that *xing* is good, to diverge from it is to violate the sages' teachings. In fact, the distinction between good and evil is a law of nature, the absence of which means ethical confusion. Goodness, as the profound root of the *tianxia* (all-under-heaven), is ontologically substantive and inheres in human mind-heart, such that it is capable of the virtues of "centrality" *(zhong),* "ultimacy" *(ji),* "humaneness" *(ren),* "rightness" *(yi),* "propriety" *(li),* "wisdom" *(zhi),* and "trustworthiness" *(xin)*. The *Great Learning's* teaching of cultivational effort *(gongfu)* is anchored on the axiom that human nature is innately good, whose repudiation deprives the endeavor of self-cultivation of any secure standpoint. Here, Xu also takes issue with Wang Yangming's apparent

pronouncement, while responding to Wang Ji and Qian Dehong (1497–1574), that people may be categorized as two general types—those with sharp intelligence and those who are dull. On this occasion of talking with his two most outstanding pupils, Wang expounds on his famous “four maxims” *(siju jiao)* (on which there is more below). He claims that those with sharp intelligence may bypass effort and instead obtain understanding directly from the source, whereas the less intelligent will have to adhere to a learning regime in order to recover the original substance (Wang, 1963, 241–5).

For Xu, the notion of *xing’s* being beyond good and evil engenders the undesirable idea that the highly intelligent may gain knowledge and understanding without striving. Xu argues that the classics’ teachings apply to all and there is no way of getting around the *Great Learning’s* clear injunction of solid learning and ceaseless cultivation. Confucius himself gives us in no uncertain terms descriptions of his moral and intellectual toil, and we must pay heed to his admonition of “restraining ourselves in order to return to propriety *(li)*.” To the extent that li is good, Xu castigates his contemporaries for their pipe dream of realizing instantaneous enlightenment in the context of non-goodness *(wushan)*. The well-being of the social and political commonweal and its moral and ethical health are built on people’s good nature. It is because people are predisposed to doing good that rulers are able to achieve beneficent government with efficacious policies. One should not confuse the criticism of sanctimonious effort of doing good with the contention that there is no goodness as such. While the *Classic of Documents (Shangshu)* does warn of the danger of insincere and hypocritical good-doing, genuine goodness is integrally a part of the universe. In other words, the undesirability of contrived good does not negate good itself.

According to Xu’s reading, Wang Yangming’s “four maxims” are not fundamentally at odds with the notion of the innately good *xing*. Wang’s espousal of “extending innate knowledge of the good to the utmost” is pitch-perfectly consonant with traditional Confucian teaching, plainly affirming that “there is no nature that is not good, and so there is no knowing that is not good.” Therefore, Wang’s first maxim that “there is no distinction of good and evil in the original substance of the mind-heart” must be seen as the state of the mind-heart’s primal silence before its issuance *(fa)*. The other three maxims—“when the will becomes active, there is the distinction between good and evil”; “knowing good and evil is innate knowledge of the good”; “to investigate things is to do good and remove evil”—clearly demand efforts premised on the good.

Regrettably, the meanings of the “four maxims” are perverted when Wang’s followers rashly jumped to the grand conclusion that the mind-heart, will, knowledge, and things elude, descriptively and prescriptively, the good-evil dichotomy. For Xu, the main culprit is Wang Ji, who propounds the doctrine of the “four non-beings” *(siwu)* in response to the “four maxims.” Wang Ji applies the notion of non-being that transcends good and evil not only to the original substance of the mind-heart, but also to the will, knowledge, and things; and hence the four non-beings: that of the mind-heart *(xin),* that of the will *(yi),* that of knowing (zhi), and that of things *(wu)*. Xu reminds us that Qian Dehong, in contradistinction to Wang Ji, advances the theory of the “four beings” *(siyou)* as a philosophical response to Yangming’s “four maxims.” While accepting that the original mind-heart is neither good nor evil, Qian maintains there is the experiential mind-heart that, squarely situated in the workaday work, is laden with bad intents, full of unsavory habits, circumscribed by customs, and informed by traditions. As a result, in everyday

life, we cannot escape the facts of good and evil. We have no choice but to engage in time-honored learning and cultivation: investigating things, extending knowledge, rendering the will sincere, and rectifying the mind-heart. As Wang Ji tells us, Yangming accepts both theories, such that those blessed with superior intelligence *(ligen)* may be inspired by the doctrine of the "four non-beings" while those with only "dull intelligence" *(dungen)* the tenet of the "four beings."[5] Flatly, Xu rejects this artificial anthropological bifurcation as Wang Ji's fraudulent concoction, concluding that the invidious doctrine of the "four non-beings" both distorts Yangming's views of the primacy of experiential endeavor and contravenes the authentic messages of the classics.

Countering Xu Fuyuan's denouncement, Zhou Rudeng proposes "nine explanations" to defend and make Confucian sense of Wang Ji's position. Zhou avers that "beyond good and evil" *(wushan wu'e)* means that doing good and extirpating evil cannot be traced and tracked in the ordinary way of measuring and assessing achievements, if those acts are genuinely sincere and earnest. In the elevated sense of disinterested action, there is neither good nor evil, since axiological valuation no longer suffices or applies. What the classics refer to as the "ultimate authenticity" *(zhicheng)* and "highest good" *(zhishan)* of the "original substance" *(benti)* cannot possibly be encapsulated by the diurnal notion of the good, as it is the transcendent good that is pristine, prior to existential manifestation. The Mencian axiom that human nature is good already refers to a second-order good. For Zhou, the touted virtues that connote the good are posterior constructions; they are not goodness itself. Xu, by defining *xing* in terms of ethical imperatives and behavioral conditions, loses sight of authentic humanity and fails to grasp the ontological fact that ultimate reality does not rest in anything. Xu, in substantiating and instantiating the mind-heart *(xin)* as "centrality" *(zhong)*, "ultimacy" *(ji)*, and "humaneness" *(ren)*, misconstrues the *Great Learning's* central idea of *weifa*—that which is before the manifestation of feelings.

To the extent that Wang Yangming identifies nature *(xing)* with the mind-heart *(xin)*, which is in turn construed as the innate knowledge of the good *(liangzhi)* that represents our original substance *(benti)*, and insofar as the concept of substance calls to mind the Cartesian and Kantian notion of the transcendent eternality and autonomy of the substantiality of the self, it is useful to take a brief but focused look at Wang's definition of the ontological nature and status of original substance/benti that figures prominently in his philosophical system. In so doing, we may not only clarify Zhou Rudeng's reading of the master's ideas but also shed light on Wang Yangming's uniquely Confucian conception of the self. For Wang, original substance is the pristine mind-heart in which there is neither differentiation between activity and quiescence, nor between interiority and exteriority. It is a unity in itself. In that sense, original substance may be said to be permanent and unchanging. But Wang, via the notion of the innate knowledge of the good *(liangzhi)*, inserts moral intention into this very being of substance. At the deepest level, the mind-heart construed as original substance, owing to the innermost core of good intention, is at once active and tranquil. Even when emotions arise, the mind-heart is still, and in the midst of quietude, there is already action. Herein lies the ontological underpinning of Wang's famous injunction of the unity of knowing and acting. To be sure, there must be the ceaseless effort *(gongfu)* of moral self-cultivation to realize the original substance, but there must also be the awareness of its oneness and non-differentiation—its capacity to perfect itself. Thus, at the same time that *gongfu* is crucial

to the realization of *benti, benti* is inherent in *gongfu*. In so collapsing the boundary between quiescence and movement, erasing the states of pre-emoting *(weifa)* and emoting *(fa),* and unifying knowing and acting, Wang nonetheless asserts the central importance and pivotal role of moral volition, because we are forever in the thick of things both tranquil and active. Simultaneously, he affirms the dynamic nature of the original substance. In other words, self-cultivation (the act itself and the will to act morally) in concert with our original substance implies no compromise of autonomy; it only reinforces the awareness that moral exercise is integrally a part of our autonomy (Nivison, 1973, 21–38; Cheng, 1991, 135–43; Ching, 1976, 111–13; and Wang, 1963, 137).

It is precisely in terms of Wang's erasure of the ordinary distinction between *weifa* and *fa* with regard to the original substance that we may understand Zhou's contention that if human nature is innately good, then this good is by dint the highest good to which evil is irrelevant. The transcendently good nature may be likened to an infant that possesses no evil; and in the absence of evil, goodness in the ordinary sense does not exist. Zhou expresses his extreme skepticism of the conscious will and deliberate act to do good. Persuaded and induced good is not genuine, as the naturally good disposition is not contingent upon moral suasion. Ignorance of the "root" *(ben)* of reality as beyond good breeds futile views on how goodness may be attained and evil avoided. Zhou seeks testimonial in history, pointing to the sad but indisputable fact that many "factional strifes" *(tanggu),* notwithstanding their good intentions, generated more harm than good. Wang Yangming's invocation that our original substance is beyond good and evil coheres with how the ancient sage-kings felt, as they implemented subtle and light-handed policies in order to rule without obtrusion. In any event, to truly apprehend what is "beyond evil" *(wu'e)* demands effort, albeit without the usual flaunting of good-doing. Success of cultivation hinges on the introspective "self-reflection" *(zisi)* that constitutes the core of Confucius' teachings, well understood by Wang Yangming. Refusing to be bogged down by the distinction between the mind-heart before and after its manifestation, Zhou embraces Wang Ji's theory of non-being. Given the premise that the mind-heart transcends good and evil, the will, knowledge, and things are similarly transcendent. Reality can only be intuited with the spontaneous awakening of the mind-heart. Such, as Zhou maintains, is the key to Wang Yangming's final teachings, which cannot be reduced to a mechanistic view of human being and cultivation.[6]

As for categorizing people into two types, Zhou argues that it was Confucius' idea. In any event, the apparently divided strategies for two types of intelligence perforce converge in non-being. From Confucius' dictum of "the absence of the will and absence of the self" *(wuyi wuwo)* to Cheng Yi's proclamation of "the absence of sentiments and absence of the mind" *(wuqing wuxin),* non-being is taken to be the ultimate being. In practical terms, the sages refrain from prescribing regimes and methods of cultivation that are supposed to endure. Prescriptions for specific maladies are banished once the maladies are cured. In Zhou's anthropological conception, there is a substantial self of being. But to the extent that it transcends the world of semblance and surface, it is trans-moral and supra-ethical, resisting the subjection to methods.[7]

This philosophical debate that turns on the fulcrum of *xing's* nature brings ontological tenets to bear on visions of history, society, and individuality. Whether one thinks in terms of transcendent emancipation from, or normative adherence to, categories of good

and evil, they all, in their own way, embrace a moral belief of individuation where the sense of the self is firmly intact and never dissolves into the sort of indeterminacy and self-doubt that beset postmodern thinking about selfhood and its relation to the larger world. Indeed, the 1598 debate between Gu Xiancheng and Guan Zhidao reinforces the Confucian conviction in the unbroken continuum of self and culture.

Gu Xiancheng, a Donglin scholar who followed Cheng-Zhu learning, asserted the inexorable goodness of *xing* whereas Guan Zhidao espoused Wang Yangming's dictum that the original substance of the mind-heart was beyond good and evil.[8] Guan, aligned with the Taizhou School, understood *xing* in terms of the ultimate unity of the "Three Teachings" of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism (Ch'ien, 1986, 14–30, 39). Guan argues that Wang Yangming's idea of *xing's* transcending good and evil comes from Zhou Dunyi's (1017–73) notion of the Great Ultimate *(taiji),* which, inspired by Daoism and Buddhism, is in turn an extension of the doctrine of ultimate nothingness *(wuji).* If *xing* is the Great Ultimate, then it is also the ultimate non-being. The goodness-evil demarcation comes from the yin-yang nexus, both of which come after the Great Ultimate, which has "no opposite" *(wudui).* In the same way, nature has "no opposite." Within the Great Ultimate that is simultaneously the ultimate nothingness, the incipience of yin and yang is indeterminate, and named virtues such as humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom find no settled place. The *Classic of Change's* "creative origin" *(qianyuan)* and the *Great Learning's* "the highest good" *(zhishan)* represent this ultimate state of non-opposition (Gu, 1599, 3a). The characterization of nature as good is the mere imposition of a name, and the good-evil distinction tears apart the primal oneness of *xing*. Guan sees nature as both tranquil *(jing)* and ineffable, so that the nature that is discussed is no longer the authentic nature. Good and evil stem from the desires *(yu)* inherent in nature and not nature itself, which does not manifest itself in material force *(qi)* (*ibid.,* 2a–b).

Gu Xiancheng begins his counter-argument by contending that yin-yang should at once be understood as an undivided non-dualism in which the two forces exist in mutual identity and complementation, and a polarized dualism in opposition. Yin-yang as a holism is the Great Ultimate, which is ineluctably good. Yet, seen in the light of a polarity, yang is goodness to be nurtured and yin is evil to be curtailed (Gu, 1598, 17a–b). Gu maintains that Zhou Dunyi's equating the Great Ultimate with ultimate nothingness illustrates the common root of substance *(ti)* and function *(yong),* revealing that "there is no separation between the conspicuous and the subtle." Ultimate reality, encompassing yin-yang and the five agents (earth, water, fire, wood, and metal), is concretely good and not reducible to a supreme nothingness that nullifies the distinction of good and evil. Zhou Dunyi has told us that through movement, the Great Ultimate creates yang, and through tranquility, yin. So while it is tenable to say that before the establishment of the two modes, yin and yang are not separated, it is simply erroneous to assert that there is neither yin nor yang before their separation. Still more wrong is the extension of the flawed logic to the conception of human nature as beyond good and evil (Gu, 1599, 24b). Human nature is the Great Ultimate which is also heaven and earth. Therefore, as the sages have stated, it cannot be anything other than good (*ibid.,* 10a).

Gu takes strong issue with Guan Zhidao's separating the good of "unifying substance" *(tongti)*—"the profound virtue of great transformation" that collapses the good-evil dichotomy—and the ordinary good of the "diverse myriad" *(wanshu)*—"the small virtue

of separate dissemination" that demands the distinguishing of good from evil. In so doing, Guan commits the cardinal sin of characterizing the time-honored virtues of humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom as small virtues because they presume the existence of their opposites. To so demote the primary virtues enervates our sense of right and wrong; and to so celebrate the putative transcendent goodness emboldens the supposed autonomous subject. Such self-assertion, bereft of normative reference to the good and the bad, can scarcely contribute to communal moral living, as it obliges no one and is obliged to nothing. Gu thus takes great pains to affirm the pervasion of good (Gu, 1599, 14b–15a).

What these two debates tell us is apparently this: Be it the Xu Fuyuan and Gu Xiancheng camp, or the Zhou Yudeng and Guan Zhidao group, what they have in common is the theme of the self construed in terms of human nature, as if the central Confucian metaphysical motif of *xing* has found two very different temperaments to convey its topical message and meaning. The former camp asserts the self's substantive goodness, which serves as the ultimate ground of being where the good opposes the bad. The latter group propounds the self's transcendent goodness, which points inward to the very core of one's inner being where external characterization of good and bad is superfluous and irrelevant. Significantly, however, the *sensus communis* is the quest for the ground of ethics, whether it is the *being* of the substantive good or the *non-being* of the transcendent good. When the scholars debate views of human nature, they fully and purposefully intend to establish the ontological basis for individual moral action. Even when ultimate reality and *xing* are construed as nothingness and vacuity, there is no disappearance of the self and the obliteration of the knowing subject. By affirming *xing* as the ultimate predicate, they posit that reality is apprehended to the extent that it is realized in individual action. In fact, ultimate reality is *ipso facto* the reality of lived experience.

Though much maligned by their opponents for jejune speculation and ethical anarchism, the Confucian proponents of the non-being of the self and nature never espouse or descend into a sort of vacuous formalism that is a self-referential and fail-safe philosophical introspection, which revels in personal autonomy and uplift but eschews public engagement and melioration. A Wang Yangming or a Wang Ji does not face the predicament of postmodern deconstructionist ethics, that is, the difficulty of transition from exploring and opening up space for multiple decisions to making the decision, from embracing the responsibility of interrogating received traditions and wisdoms to the actual act of questioning and critiquing them, from making concessions to the alterity of the other to accepting the substantiality of the self, from debunking ideological myths to building anew functioning worldviews, and finally, from creating a space for the ethical to actually filling it with the political (cf. Critchley, 1999, 237–47). Thus tied to the horns of the dilemma that is postmodernity, short of a stable notion of the self and the knowing subject, deconstructionist ethical philosophy never quite fully comes to grips with the ethical, moral, and resultant political questions: "What should I make of my life?" "What do I owe others?" and "What are the functions of a state?" Its ethics is a coolly celebratory solitude: the world is only constituted by the separate bodies defined by alterity and *différance*. To many a critic, such a philosophy in the end boasts a vision that is at once thrillingly gargantuan in its critical ken and asphyxiatingly narrow in its practical application.

Such is not the problem in the late imperial Chinese espousal of non-being of the self with its transcendent goodness, notwithstanding the vituperative invective hurled at it by some contemporary scholars. For Wang Yangming, that our being possesses the quintessence of the *liangzhi,* the innate knowing of the good, cannot be questioned and doubted. When, in his “four maxims,” he suggests that the mind-heart endowed with *liangzhi* is beyond good and evil, he is referring to the ideal (and hence static, original, eternal, and universal) state of our very being where it is at rest with itself, which is identical with the cosmos and heaven as they naturally are. Such an anthropological and cosmological conception of being presumes the superfluity of the talk of good and evil in the ordinary sense. More important, to the extent that we innately know what is good, Wang unabashedly portrays the individuality of the self in terms of its authenticity, so that life is the existential quest for who we really are. This robust and replete self is a finished self to be renewed and realized; it is not an unfinished self to be completed. Wang also gives us a picture of the self in terms of the existential creativity propelled by its innate capacity to know the good. In short, it is an autonomous self in complete command of its own thoughts and ideals. But while its plan of life is the self-chosen one of realizing and doing good in the spirit of the ever-creative and ever-changing cosmos, it is a self ineluctably wedded to the inescapable fiduciary commitments, born into a web of social nexus and obligations.

This Confucian conception of the self, in contradistinction to the modernist substantialist counterpart, may well elide the postmodernist charges and challenges.[9] One may reasonably argue that Western metaphysics in general is primarily a quest for being, insofar as being is construed as an independent and permanent object of intellection, so much so that the self, especially in Kantian terms, is defined with reference to the objectivity of the moral will that is pruned of emotional contents. On the other hand, scores of scholars, such as Tu Wei-ming, Wm. Theodore de Bary, Chung-ying Cheng, Roger Ames, and Henry Rosemont, have variously told us the Confucian self is, in its essentials, a “relational self” (Rosement, 1998, 54–66; Tu, 1985, 7–16, de Bary, 1991, 1–41, Cheng, 1989, 167–208, and Ames, 1994, 187–212). It is relational in the sense that the self, while exercising and realizing its very autonomy in the ceaseless and dynamic pursuit of self-cultivation and spiritual development, is situated at the center of an englobing relatedness, such that one’s becoming authentically human is simultaneously one’s apprehending and embracing fully the socio-communal. To put it another way, the Confucian self is at once individualistic and communal, unlike the Western self, which is radically atomistic and individualistic, be it the modern or postmodern one (Rosement, 1998, 54–66). We may add that the Confucian self, as humanity’s original nature, can be regarded as “divine in its all-embracing fullness,” being “both immanent and transcendent” (Bellah, 1976, 125). It is ontologically substantial and substantive in that heaven’s principle (or the *dao* and *taiji*) is inherent in human nature, such that the innately good self is endowed with onto-cosmological creativity.

Therefore, when Wang Ji extends Wang Yangming’s idea to propound the philosophy of the non-being of the mind-heart, will, knowledge, and things, he nevertheless first appeals to the notion of the essential goodness of our being, understood as “the ultimate good” *(zhishan).* In his crystal-clear words: “As for my late teacher’s doctrine of passing beyond good and evil, it addresses the opposition between good and evil. Nature in its original state has no evil and so there is no good to be obtained and named. The

transcendence of good and evil is the ultimate good." To put it another way, "nature is nothing but the good, and so our knowledge is nothing but the good. Good and evil connote the meaning of opposition. Being neither good or evil is what is known as the ultimate good. Ultimate good is the original substance of the mind-heart" (Peng, 2003, 229–30). Understood in the context of the ultimate, the non-ness of being, as it were, comes from the banishment of the attachment to the idea of the good. This entails the forgetting of doing good while doing what is supremely good, as the consciousness of good smacks of pride and self-righteousness. Being burdened by consciousness and deliberateness, as Wang Yangming metaphorically describes it, is similar to having gold in the eyes. While we cannot gainsay the value of this precious metal, stuck in our eyes, it diminishes our capacity to see (Tang, 1970, 109–10). Thus Wang Ji's non-being of being, construed as the innate knowing of the good, describes, in phenomenological terms, the transcendent way in which we apprehend the truths of reality. The knowing subject and its workings are "non-existent" *(wu),* "empty" *(kong),* "vacuous" *(xu),* and "still" *(ji)* in that they are supremely spontaneous in the process of their realization and manifestation in moral self-cultivation and socio-ethical activism. While all that one does is good, there is no conscious idea and contrived conception of its goodness. It is in the sense of such supra-consciousness, trans-ethicality and preter-morality that our *liangzhi* is said to be "nothingness." Wang Ji explains, "To say that *liangzhi* knows what is right and what is wrong is to say that in the origin, there is neither right nor wrong. It expresses the true meanings of the authentically right and the authentically wrong. It does not come from the idea that there is never the right and the wrong" (Peng, 2003, 42). In the final analysis, Wang Ji asserts the being of non-being.

If there was, in late imperial China, the questioning of the axiological conception of an ontologically substantial self tied to the well-worn social norms of right and wrong and hide-bound cultural values of truth and falsity, there was never true subversion of the conviction in the plenitude and creativity of the self. In the recent West, the deconstructionist thinkers of good will, faced with the incomprehensible and gratuitous horrors of modernity—the world wars, the Holocaust, the specter of technological annihilation, the desecration of the environment, and so on—seek to come to terms with the keen awareness that there is an alienating chasm between the human capacity of rationality and the apparent unintelligibility and intractability of the universe. They do so by positing humanity's inability to gain access not only to the truth of being but also the transcendent. In the process, they are resigned to accepting the delimiting understanding and local knowledge that all thoughts are untestable projections of the human mind and all words are unstable vehicles to transport lasting meanings. Human beings, therefore, best live an ethical life as diminished and superannuated selves subordinate to the realities and dictates of alterity and *différance*. Such is the scaled-down deconstructionist answer to the ethical question of what we should make of ourselves. By contrast, in both Confucian discourse and action, the self is always called into being as the fully embodied *who,* in both human and cosmic terms. The self is not a simple *what,* an inert nature and static essence. It is a person who is free from the abstract nouns of "being" and "transcendence" but remains open to the experience and the fact of transcendent truths in the midst of human finitude and relations. The self is good and knows the good, and thus chooses to, as the *Great Learning* exhorts, cultivate the self, bring order to the family, govern the state, and achieve peace in the world (cf. de Bary, 1991, 1–25; Tu,

1985, 51–65; Ames, 1984, 39–45). In this ever-widening nexus of the personal and the public, the Confucian self, whether it is construed as being or non-being, finds ethico-moral fulfillment.

Notes

1 Other scholars, such as Tu Wei-ming, have also written evocatively about this distinct self, which is replete with moral proclivities and awareness, as the very agent and site of transcendence (Tu, 1985:19–28; 35–50). For a survey of the Chinese philosophical views on human nature, see Zhang, 1982, 183–232. Note that P.J.Ivanhoe has urged us to pay attention to the main differences between classical Confucian and Neo-Confucian conceptions of human nature, although they both undoubtedly subscribe to the primacy and centrality of *xing*. See Ivanhoe, 1995, 81–9.

2 Cf. R.G.Collingwood's doctrine of *Speculum Mentis* that sees philosophy as expatiation upon known experiences. In the words of Louis Mink: "Philosophy is not a specialized form of experience but the self-consciousness of experience in general… The doctrine of *Speculum Mentis*…[is] the doctrine that the 'conclusions' of philosophical thinking and the 'experience' on which they are based are names for any two successive stages on a philosophical scale of forms" (Mink, 1969, 253–4).

3 For illustrative examples of such perspective on learning and thought, see Zhang, 1982, 497–527.

4 Therefore, while learned scholars such as Tu Wei-ming and Wm. Theodore de Bary have written insightfully about the Confucian "self," they do not use the word as though it is a translation of a directly comparable Chinese term in a philosophical and metaphysical sense, although de Bary does discuss zi, understood as the individual, as the locus and fulcrum of ethical action. See de Bary, 1991, 25–37 and also Tu, 1985.

5 On Wang Ji's and Qian Dehong's explanations of the "four maxims" and Wang Yangming's response, see Wang, 1963, 243–5, Okada, 1970, 126–9, Tang, 1970, 112–13 and Huang, 1987, 115–16.

6 On Wang Ji's view of the "four non-beings," see Wang, 1963, 241–2; Okada, 1970, 126–9; Wu, 2003, 57–70; and Peng, 2003, 175–238.

7 The foregoing summary is based on an analysis of the original texts of the "Nine Scrutinies" by Xu and "Nine Explanations" by Zhou, included in Huang, 1985, 861–8.

8 Details of their divergent opinions are recorded in a two-part essay that Gu penned: "Questions on the Doubtful, Part One" *(zhiyi shang)* of 1598 and "Questions on the Doubtful, Part Two" *(zhiyi xia)* of 1599. This essay came to be included into a larger work by Gu, devoted entirely to the problem of human nature, *A Treatise on Corroborating Human Nature (Zhengxing pian),* published in 1600. This treatise can be found in *Gu Duanwengong yishu (Bequeathed Writings by Gu Xiancheng)* (n.p., 1877 edn.).

9 Interestingly enough, with regard to the cultural project of the so-called New Confucianism, by dint of its Western modernist philosophical filiations and uncomfortable situation in the postmodern context, engagement and confrontation with such a challenge may be a necessary task.

6
LACKING ETHICS

David R.Loy

> Deconstruction without compassion is self-aggrandizement; deconstruction with compassion is Buddhism.
>
> (Robert Haas)

What makes deconstruction with compassion Buddhist? For that matter, what makes a deconstruction compassionate? The best way to approach those questions is with some examples. This chapter focuses on two different types of deconstruction, both with obvious ethical implications: the deconstruction of antithetical concepts, especially the dualism between good and evil; and the deconstruction of (sense of) self, implied by the Buddhist critique of *anattā*. If Derridean deconstruction emphasizes the former, Buddhism emphasizes the latter. Of course, the two types are inextricably related, and in the context of this chapter any deconstruction of the self will be conceptual. Nevertheless, the distinction between concept and self is important because for Buddhism it is not enough to grasp that our sense of self is a construct: any such understanding needs to be embodied in the ways we live in the world. It is our lives that most need to be deconstructed and reconstructed.

Deconstructing good and evil

> Without relation to "good" there is no "bad", in dependence on which we form the idea of "good." Therefore "good" [by itself] is unintelligible. There is no "good" unrelated to "bad"; yet we form our idea of "bad" in dependence on it. There is therefore no "bad" [by itself].
>
> (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 23, 10–11, in Sprung, 1979, 213)

Early in the twenty-first century the antinomy between good and evil has already become, if not more important, more public and controversial. In the days immediately following the 11 September terrorist attacks, President Bush declared that the United States had been called to a new worldwide mission "to rid the world of evil and evil-doers," and such rhetoric has remained an important part of political discourse since then. In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush identified a new "axis of evil" (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea). Two years later a couple of his senior advisors, David Frum and Richard Perle,

published *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*. Ironically, this way of thinking puts the neo-cons in the same camp as al-Qaeda: they embrace the same way of understanding the world. What bin Laden sees as good—an Islamic *jihad* against an impious imperialism—Bush sees as evil, and what Bush sees as good—America the defender of freedom and democracy—bin Laden sees as evil. That makes them two different versions of the same holy war between good and evil. For both sides, once something has been identified as evil, there is no more need to explain it; it is time to focus on fighting against it. Those who are good have a moral obligation to destroy those who are not.

Although subsequent events revealed that the terrorist attacks have been used to justify a preexisting political agenda, the need for a *public* deconstruction of this dangerous duality remains urgent, especially when we remember that "an end to evil" is also what Hitler and Stalin sought. What was the problem with Jews that required a "final solution"? The earth could be made pure for the Aryan race only by exterminating the Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally defective, etc.—all the impure vermin who contaminate it. Stalin needed to exterminate the *kulaks,* well-to-do Russian peasants, in order to establish his ideal society of collective farmers. Both sought to perfect the world by eliminating its impurities. "Evil arises in the honored belief that history can be tidied up, brought to a sensible conclusion" (Carse, 1986, 33).

Another irony, then, is that one of the main causes of evil in this world has been human attempts to eradicate evil. In more Buddhist terms, much of the world's *dukkha* "suffering, dis-ease" continues to be a result of our delusive ways of thinking about good and evil. Warnings against such dichotomizing are common in Mahāyāna, especially the Prajñāpāramitā literature and Chan/Zen:

> *Danaparamita* means relinquishment…of the dualism of opposites. It means total relinquishment of ideas as to the dual nature of good and bad, being and non-being, love and aversion, void and not void, concentration and distraction, pure and impure. By giving all of them up, we attain to a state in which all opposites are seen as void.
>
> …thinking in terms of good and evil is wrong; not to think so is right thinking. The same applies to all the other categories of opposites—sorrow and joy, beginning and end…all of which are called wrong thinking, while to abstain from thinking in those categories is called right thinking.
>
> (Hui Hai, in Blofeld, 1969, 52; 49–50)

As a third irony, we must charitably assume that a tongue-in-cheek Hui Hai was aware of the self-negating claim in the second passage: dualistic thinking is rejected as wrong thinking, but of course the distinction between wrong thinking and right thinking is itself dualistic. This inconsistency, or paradox, characterizes most deconstruction: the deconstructed categories are not rejected but reinscribed—in Buddhist terms, as *śūnya,* "empty." As the *Diamond Sūtra* delights in reminding us, A is not A, therefore it is A: teaching that there is no dharma to teach is teaching the dharma; realizing that there are no sentient beings to save is saving them, etc. In more Derridean terms, ethics is

deconstructed not to escape the ethical but to reveal a persistent, resistant archi-ethical. The foundationless foundation of all ethics?

Classically, evil has been understood as lack of the good, *privatio boni*. Since the good is also understood as an attribute or function of Being, extreme evil is close to nothingness, metaphysically at least. Such a hierarchy ("sacred order") of Being over Non-being is not found in Buddhism, which emphasizes *śūnyatā* instead, but the traditional Western understanding of good and evil does at least highlight their interdependence. When we distinguish between antithetical ethical terms it is usually because we prefer one of them to the other. Psychologically as well as logically, however, the meaning of each depends upon the other, which makes the antithesis quite problematical, as the holy war on terrorism reminds us. If, for example, it is important for me to live a pure life (however purity is understood), then my life will be preoccupied with (avoiding) impurity. We cannot identify with one pole without also accepting the other, and such polarizing lenses mediate our experience of the world. When we focus so much on some aspects (who is rich, who is poor; who is famous, who is not; etc.), we are less able to perceive and appreciate others.

How does the interdependence of good and evil, in particular, bedevil us? The problem is not only that we don't know what is good until we know what is evil; more troublesome is that we can't feel we are good unless we are fighting against that evil. We can rest comfortably and securely in our own goodness only by attacking and destroying the evil outside us. St. George needs that dragon in order to be St. George; his heroic identity requires it.[1] Sad to say, this also points to one of the main attractions of war: it offers a collective version of the same projection. War cuts through the petty problems of daily life, by uniting us good guys here against the bad guys there. The meaning of our lives becomes simpler and clearer, once the source of our problems is understood to be outside us, over there. Unsurprisingly, then, there is something in us, or some part of us, that tends to love this struggle between good (us) and evil (them), because it is, in its own fashion, an easy, satisfying way of making sense of the world and reassuring ourselves of our role (the good guys) within it. For example, many Americans today are so deeply invested in such a positive image of the United States that no amount of contrary information—e.g., learning about the history of US foreign policy—can persuade them otherwise.

What archi-ethical is revealed by such a Buddhist deconstruction of the ethical? To anticipate, ethical dualism for Buddhism is related to, indeed grounded in, the more fundamental dualism of self and other. To deconstruct subject-object non-duality exposes the non-dual ground of the archi-ethical: if "I" am not separate from others, the traditional ethical problem of how we should relate to each other is transformed. This is the context for understanding Buddhist emphasis on love—*karuṇā*, compassion; *maitrī*, friendliness; *muditā*, sympathetic joy, etc.—which might be called the non-dual "archi-emotion" that manifests the wisdom of self/other non-duality. As Augustine put it: love, and do as you will.

> Hatred *[vera]* never ends through hatred. By non-hate *[avera]* alone does it end. This is an ancient truth.
>
> (*Dhammapada*, verse 5)

Ethical guidelines are necessary mainly because we feel separate from others and need to reconcile our different interests. Understanding how that sense of separation is a delusion uncovers a different foundation for our relationships. We do not ask: why should I take care of my foot?

This is not to deny alterity. Non-duality is not sameness but non-separation. Of course, my foot is not the same as my hand, or my head, but they are interdependent. Likewise, our interconnectedness does not make you the same as me, but inasmuch as the sense of self is a psychological construct that develops as part of our socialization, we are constructed and continue to be reconstructed by each other. The Buddhist doctrine of *karma* was revolutionary because its emphasis on *cetanā* (motivation, volition) extended this insight ethically: if it is self-defeating to seek my own benefit at the price of yours, the ethical problem of how to relate to each other becomes transposed into a different issue, the delusive sense of self. Whether or not ethics is always contaminated by the non-ethical, Buddhist ethics originates in our *dukkha*. Does that mean the end of *dukkha* is also the end of ethics? If concern to overcome sense of self is at the root of our most troublesome *dukkha,* how is that delusion to be deconstructed?

Deconstructing self and other

> There is a line a famous Zen master wrote at the time he became enlightened which reads: "When I heard the temple bell ring, suddenly there was no bell and no I, just sound." In other words, he no longer was aware of a distinction between himself, the bell, the sound, and the universe. This is the state you have to reach…
>
> Stated negatively, it is the realization that the universe is not external to you. Positively, it is experiencing the universe as yourself.
>
> (Yasutani, in Kapleau, 1966, 107, 137)

If the self is a construct, so is the external world, for they are results of the same process and each implies the other. When there is no inside, there is no outside. In the *Sokushinzebutsu* ("Our mind is the Buddha") fascicle of the *Shobogenzo,* Dōgen described his own experience by quoting the Chinese master Yang-shan (d. 916): "I came to realize clearly that mind is nothing other than mountains, rivers and the great wide earth, the sun, the moon and the stars" (quoted in Kapleau, 1966, 205). If our usual sense of separation from mountains, etc., is a delusion, then our non-duality with them is not something that needs to be attained. Instead, the delusion of a discrete self merely needs to be dispelled, and one way to do that is to concentrate on something so wholeheartedly that the sense of a separate "I" that is *doing it* evaporates. This approach is implied by Dōgen in *Genjo-koan,* the first fascicle of the *Shobogenzo:*

> To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.
>
> (Tanahashi, 1985, 70)

"Forgetting oneself" is how we lose our sense of separation and realize that we are not other than the world. Meditation (e.g., *zazen*) is learning to forget the sense-of-self, which happens when "I" become absorbed into "my" meditation-exercise. If sense-of-self is a result of consciousness reflecting back upon itself in an attempt to grasp itself, such meditation-practice makes sense as an exercise in *de-reflection*. Consciousness unlearns trying to grasp itself, real-ize itself, objectify itself. Awakening occurs when the usually automatized reflexivity of consciousness ceases, which is experienced as a letting go and falling into the void. "Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma" (Huang Po, in Blofeld, 1958, 41). When I no longer strive to make myself real through things, I find myself "actualized" by them: awakened to the possibilities they provide.

Such a non-dual experience does not transcend the world except in the sense that it reveals what that world is when there is no attachment to particular things—including myself, especially myself—within it. If mind is "mountains, rivers, earth, the sun, the moon and the stars," this mind is nothing other than your mind and my mind insofar as they are ab-solute in the original etymology of the term: un-conditioned. Meditative techniques decondition the mind from its tendency to secure itself by circling in familiar ruts (recurring thoughts, feelings, dispositions, etc.), thus freeing it to become anything. The most-quoted line from the *Diamond Sutra* encapsulates this in one phrase: "A bodhisattva should develop a mind that functions freely, without dependence on anything or any place" (Soeng, 2000, 103). The archi-ethical arises out of the unmediated phenomenological encounter that can now occur.

An example of Zen *koan* practice is helpful here. In the Zen lineage I am most familiar with, a first *koan* such as Joshu's Mu is treated somewhat like a mantra. Putting all one's attention into "muuu…" (repeated silently during breath exhalations) undermines the sense-of-self by letting go of the reflective mental processes that sustain it. At the beginning of such practice, one attempts to concentrate on "muuu…" but inevitably distractions arise such as thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc. A later, more focused stage is when one can concentrate on "muuu…" without losing it: "muuu…" effectively keeps other thoughts, etc., away. The stage when "both inside and outside naturally fuse" occurs when there is no longer the sense of an "I" that is repeating an objective sound; there is only "muuu…" This stage is sometimes described by saying that now "muuu…" is doing "muuu…": it is "muuu…" that sits, walks, eats, and so forth. At this point the teacher may help by cutting the last thread: an unexpected action, such as a blow or shout or even a few quiet words, may startle the student into letting go. "All of a sudden he finds his mind and body wiped out of existence, together with the koan. This is what is known as 'letting go your hold'" (Hakuin, as quoted in Suzuki, 1956, 148).[2] One classical

Chan story tells how Kuei-shan Ling-yu (771–853) was awakened by the sound of a pebble striking bamboo. When the practice is ripe, the shock of an unexpected sensation can help it to penetrate to the very core of one's empty sense of being—that is, it can be experienced non-dually.

The primary ethical implication of this deconstruction is the realization that my life and destiny cannot be extricated from that of "others" in the world. In this way responsibility for others arises naturally as the expression of genuine awakening. Hee-Jin Kim explains Dōgen's view of the Buddhist precepts as nothing other than such *tathata*, "thusness":

> *Not-to-commit-any-evil* is neither the heteronomous "Thou shalt not" nor the autonomous "I will not," but is *non-contrivance*… When morality becomes effortless, purposeless, and playful, it becomes a non-moral morality which is the culmination of Zen practice of the Way in which morality, art, and play merge together. When *ought* becomes *is* in the transparency of thusness, only then do we come to the highest morality. Moral excellence as such does not constitute absolute freedom and purity from the religious and metaphysical standpoint. Only when an ought becomes an expression of thusness, does it reach the highest morality.
>
> (Kim, 1975, 294)

Thusness is thus another aspect of the archi-ethical for a bodhisattva, who, having nothing to gain or lose herself, can be wholly devoted to the welfare of others, even as the heart might be said to be devoted to the healthy functioning of the rest of the body. Contrary to popular Buddhist belief, then, this concern for others is not a self-sacrifice: to help others is to help myself, for no one is really saved until we are all saved. Liberation means forgetting one's own *dukkha* only to wake up in, or *one with*, a world full of *dukkha*. This experience is not sympathy or empathy but com-passion, "suffering with." What will the meaning of life be for such a person, freed from our usual narcissistic self-preoccupation? The career of the bodhisattva is helping others, not because one "ought to," but because one is not separate from one's situation and through oneself that situation draws forth a response to meet its needs.

Deconstructing the wego-self

Whether or not the above way of explaining Buddhist compassion and responsibility is illuminating, its concrete implications remain rather vague. An awakened person's compassion can manifest as very different, even incompatible ways of "helping." A bodhisattva might give more money to begging streetpeople, or decide to exercise "ruthless compassion" to discourage that lifestyle. The non-dual experience itself does not automatically reveal the best way to help people. In that regard, *kensho* (self-realization, lit. "seeing one's nature") is no substitute for other types of experience.

That in itself is not necessarily a problem: there are many ways to help people. What is a problem is the possibility of a deconstructed ego-self nevertheless deferring to a collective "we-go-self," which has institutionalized a form of collective dualism: a group-

ego still understanding itself in opposition to a group-other. Traditionally, someone who wants to be a bodhisattva vows to "save" all sentient beings, but in practice it is not easy to escape one's social conditioning. Insofar as social ethics often emphasizes subordinating oneself to the welfare of one's group, there is the danger that supposedly "liberated" persons will nevertheless identify with the less universalized normative standards of their own society—a problem aggravated by Buddhism's adaptability, which traditionally has made Buddhism vulnerable to co-optation by the values and goals of political elites.

There is a particularly egregious contrast between early Buddhist emphasis on *ahiṃsā*, "non-harm," and the samurai Zen that developed in Japan. For Demieville, their contrast is paradoxical: "The Hinayana, which tends to condemn life, has remained strict in the prohibition of killing; and it is the Mahāyāna, which extols life, that has ended up by finding excuses for killing and even for its glorification" (Demieville, 1957, 353). In *Zen and Japanese Culture* D.T.Suzuki addresses this apparent contradiction: Zen never incited samurai to carry on their violent profession, but it has sustained them morally and philosophically when they have "for whatever reason once entered into it." Morally, because Zen teaches us not to look backwards once one's course is decided upon; philosophically, because Zen is a religion of the will which is indifferent to the problem of life-or-death, according to Suzuki. Zen has no other doctrine or philosophy, and "is therefore extremely flexible in adapting itself to almost any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with. It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political or economic dogmatism" (Suzuki, 1959, 61, 63).

The same could hardly be said for Pali Buddhism, which is strict in its prohibition against taking life. The eightfold path includes right action (not harming living beings, etc.) and right livelihood (not making one's living through a profession that brings harm to others). The *Dhammapada* applies this attitude to war in a way obviously incompatible with the martial role of the samurai: "Victory gives birth to hate; the defeated sleep in anguish. Giving up both victory and defeat, those who have attained peace sleep happily" (verse 200).

Japan, however, has been very good at adapting foreign influences to fit its own culture, and Buddhism is famously adaptable. This adaptability has been a two-edged sword, enabling Buddhism to permeate other cultures, but also allowing Buddhism to be co-opted by political elites. The Mahāyāna doctrine that the bounds *(koti)* of samsara are not different from the bounds of nirvana may be understood in opposite ways: the true nature of samsara may be taken as nirvana itself, or nirvana can be redefined in more this-worldly ways that end up rationalizing cravings, nationalism, and subservience to secular authority.

The issue of social hierarchy has been especially problematical for Japanese Zen, which came to emphasize devotion to one's daimyo (feudal lord) more than one's personal path of liberation from desire and delusion. Or, more precisely, the two tended to be equated: to let go of oneself was understood to mean identifying completely with one's daimyo. Karma was understood as destiny, which meant that a son born into a samurai family was fated to become a samurai himself. "And free as Zen may have been in some respects from the bonds of the Buddhist tradition, it was not free from the bonds of the teaching of karma" (King, 1993, 33).

The problem with accepting one's karmic destiny is that a collective "wego," such as the Japanese understanding of egolessness encouraged, is not intrinsically superior to the individual ego. It may be even more dangerous, depending on how one's energies are channeled. The absolute loyalty expected by family heads and daimyo did not extend to inter-daimyo rela-tions, for their agreements tended to be marriages of convenience, "a cagey betting on the winner of the next set of battles, cemented by intermarriages and hostages. Hence Japanese military history is full of temporary alliances, broken or shifted when conditions changed" (King, 1993, 132).

That Zen taught the samurai to be more loyal to their daimyo and to fight better for their daimyo elevated that social relationship above the most important Buddhist precept not to kill living beings, especially humans. When we consider all the killing that has occurred on behalf of abstractions such as God or more worldly utopias-to-come, egoless devotion to a particular person can seem attractive, but only until we ask whether what inspired that daimyo was anything more than his (and his clan's) own desires for power, wealth and prestige. Accepting one's karmic role in such a social system does provide a clear, simple solution to the perennial problem about the meaning of one's life; this, however, was not Sakyamuni's solution, which involved withdrawing from the secular world and, by implication, criticizing its preoccupations, including warfare.

The Code of the Samurai exhorts that "one who is a samurai must before all things keep constantly in mind, by day and by night,…the fact that he has to die. That is his chief business." Then did the bushido code provide an ethic, or did it embody an archi-ethical, or did it provide something else altogether? That is, in what sense did it provide some moral authority to temper secular authority? According to Roger Ames, "bushido, being centered in this resolution to die, is not in any strict sense an ethical system at all… In essence, it does not represent any particular mode of conduct or normative standards" (Ames, quoted in King, 1993, 110). This may remind us of the bodhisattva, whose compassionate activities are not limited by the bounds of conventional morality, yet insofar as Zen did not provide an alternative moral perspective on a hierarchical and violent social system, it became co-opted by it. "Of course, historically, the proponent of bushido, the samurai, did align himself with a prevailing morality, or more likely was born into circumstances where the decision of moral alignment was predetermined" *(ibid.)*.

This problem did not cease with the Meiji Restoration. Instead, the nationalism and state militarism of post-Meiji Japan aggravated it, as Brian Victoria has shown in *Zen at War* (1997), which focuses on institutional Buddhism, especially Zen, from 1868 to the present day. D.T.Suzuki's teacher Shaku Soen, a progressive, university-educated *roshi* who portrayed Buddhism as a "universal religion" at the World Parliament of Religions, actively supported the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), justifying it with the usual rationalizations:

> War is not necessarily horrible, provided that it is fought for a just and honorable cause, that it is fought for the upholding of humanity and civilization. Many material human bodies may be destroyed, many humane hearts be broken, but from a broader point of view these sacrifices are so many phoenixes consumed in the sacred fire of

> spirituality, which will arise from the smoldering ashes reanimated, ennobled, and glorified.
>
> (Soen, 1971, 211–12)

When Tolstoy wrote asking him to cooperate in appealing for peace, Soen refused and visited the war front to encourage the troops, declaring that:

> war against evils must be unflinchingly prosecuted till we attain the final aim. In the present hostilities, into which Japan has entered with great reluctance, she pursues no egoistic purpose, but seeks the subjugation of evils hostile to civilization, peace, and enlightenment.
>
> *(Ibid.)*

George W.Bush could not have expressed it better. Instead of an archiethical grounded in the deconstruction of self and other, we have another Holy War between the good (us) and the evil (them).

Soen's identification with the state was echoed by countless other Zen priests and temples. By 1930 institutional Buddhism was firmly committed to providing ideological support for all military efforts wherever they might occur. In 1934 Harada Daiun Sogaku, the abbot of Hosshinji who later became well known in the West due to Kapleau's influential *The Three Pillars of Zen* (1996), recommended implementing fascist politics and criticized education for making people shallow and "cosmopolitan minded." In 1939 he described the oneness of Zen and war: "[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]" (Victoria, 1997, 137).

What is most discomforting about these examples is not that Soen and Harada support war, but that they invoke Buddhism to justify and promote it. In Soen's case, a terminology appropriate to Armageddon is used to excuse a war of colonial expansion. Harada uses the non-duality of self and other in a way that flatly contradicts the basic spirit of Sakyamuni's teachings. The problem is not so much that Soen and Harada were products of their time, but that the Japanese Zen of their time contributed to making and keeping them so.

In sum, insofar as Japanese Zen practice works to deconstruct concepts, including ethical ones, and emphasizes non-duality with one's immediate situation, many of its practitioners have been not less but more vulnerable to the prevailing ideology, more likely to be co-opted by the dominant social system. Instead of providing a moral perspective on secular authority, Zen practice often ended up helping to sacralize secular authority. Its deconstruction of ethics failed to liberate any "archi-ethical" except feudal loyalty, with the result that deconstruction of the self replaced ego with a "we-go" even more problematical. This suggests the need to supplement a traditional Buddhist deconstruction of ethics with a contemporary Buddhist critique of the ethical implications of institutions such as the nation-state.[3]

Deconstructing lack

> All tremble at violence; all fear death. Seeing others as being like yourself, do not kill or cause others to kill.
>
> (*Dhammapada,* verse 129)

The above critique of samurai Zen supports the conclusion that non-duality, although implying universal compassion in principle, can encourage a type of ethical relativism in practice, which contextualizes and appropriates Buddhist awakening according to prevailing social norms. There is, however, another aspect of non-dual experience that needs to be considered: its consequences for the ways the "empty" sense-of-self usually tries to secure itself in the world. Insofar as those attempts to secure ourselves encourage much of our unethical behavior, the Buddhist deconstruction of self has some other important ethical implications.

If the archi-ethical for Buddhism is a love that manifests the wisdom of our "interpermeation," what is the alternative which reflects the more common ignorance of that fact? Logically, the opposite of love is hatred, but hatred as we know is often inverted, frustrated love. Psychologically, the opposite of love is fear. Does their polarity point to our two basic modes of being in the world?

> Contrary to what we may believe there are only two authentic core emotions; they are love and fear. Other emotions are secondary and are typically masks for fear. Of these, anger is very common. Although we may have come to regard anger as a source emotion, it is really a smokescreen for fear. When we look at our anger, we can always find fear buried beneath it.
>
> (Mel Schwartz)[4]

Fear of what? We fear many things, but ultimately fear is *of* and *for* the self, and derivatively for whatever the sense of self identifies with.[5] What does it mean, then, if there is no self? Although psychotherapy today has achieved much insight into the dynamics of our mental *dukkha* (repression, transference, etc.), the Buddhist denial of self points more directly at the root of the problem: not dread of death, finally—a fear still keeps the feared thing at a distance by projecting it into the future—but the more immediate and terrifying (because quite valid) suspicion that "I" am not real right now. If the self is a delusive construct, there is a subtle yet significant distinction between fear of death and fear of the void: our deepest anxiety is our own groundlessness, which we become aware of as a sense of *lack* that motivates our compulsive yet futile attempts to ground ourselves, in one way or another. At the heart of our *dukkha* is our *anattā*.

Sakyamuni Buddha did not use psychoanalytic terms, but our understanding of *anattā* can benefit from the concept of repression and what Freud described as the return of the repressed in symbolic form. If something (a mental wish, according to Freud) makes me uncomfortable and I do not want to cope with it consciously, I can choose to ignore or

"forget" it. This allows me to concentrate on something else, yet what has been repressed tends to return to consciousness, irrupting in obsessive ways as symptoms. Existential psychologists have argued that our primary repression is the awareness that we are going to die. *Anattā* implies a slightly different perspective.

The *skandha* and *pratītya-samutpāda* doctrines analyze the sense-of-self into sets of impersonal mental and physical processes, whose interaction creates the illusion of self-consciousness—i.e., that consciousness is the attribute of a self. Yet our consciousness is more like the surface of the sea, dependent on unfathomable depths that it can never grasp because it is a manifestation of them. The problem is that this conditioned consciousness wants to ground itself, to make itself (feel) more *real*.

The consequence of its perpetual failure to do so is that the sense-of-self is always shadowed by a sense-of-lack, which it always tries to escape. The return of the repressed in the distorted form of a symptom shows us how to link this basic yet hopeless project with the symbolic ways we usually try to make ourselves real in the world. We experience our sense of lack as the feeling that "there is something wrong with me," but that feeling manifests, and we respond to it, in many different ways. The tragedy of all our objectifications, however, is that no amount of X can ever be enough if it is not really X that we want. When we do not understand what is actually motivating us—because what we *think* we need is only a symptom of something else—we end up compulsive.

Then the neurotic's anguish and despair are not the result of his symptoms but their source. Those symptoms are necessary to shield him from the tragedies that the rest of us are better at repressing: death, meaninglessness, groundlessness. "The irony of man's condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation [read *lack*]; but it is life itself which awakens it, and so we must shrink from being fully alive" (Becker, 1973, 66). If the autonomy of self-consciousness is a delusion which can never quite shake off its shadow-feeling that "something is wrong with me," it will need to rationalize that sense of inadequacy somehow.

Of course, one of the main ways we rationalize our sense of inadequacy is ethical: we have done what we should not, we have acted *badly*. No wonder, then, that morality has so often been a matter of collecting brownie points (e.g., Buddhist merit), or compensating for negative religious brownie points (e.g., Christian sin), so long as we think that is the way to get a grip on our eligibility for immortality—or for *being*.

> The whole basis of the urge to goodness is to be something that has value, that endures… Man uses morality to try to get a place of special belongingness and perpetuation in the universe… Do we wonder why one of man's chief characteristics is his tortured dissatisfaction with himself, his constant self-criticism? It is the only way he has to overcome the sense of hopeless limitation inherent in his real situation.
>
> (Becker, 1973, 154)

What a relief, then, when that tortured satisfaction can be turned outward, self-criticism replaced with other-criticism. No wonder we are so eager to find an evil external to ourselves.

A Buddhist emphasis on the *dukkha* caused by *anattā* shifts our focus from the terror of future annihilation (and ethical devices to qualify for eternity) to the anguish of a

groundlessness experienced here and now. On this account, even fear of death and desire for immortality symbolize something else, becoming symptomatic of our vague intuition that the ego-self is not a hard core of consciousness but a mental construction, the axis of a web spun to hide the void. Then evil is not what disqualifies us from eternal life but whatever we decide is keeping us from becoming real. Unfortunately, no victory over that "evil" can ever yield the sense of security, of being, that we seek.

Developmentally, the sense of self is internalized in childhood largely from others' views of us, and we remain acutely vulnerable to the opinions of others. This means that our quest to become real usually takes the form of attempts to gain others' approval or submission: the desire to show off one's money and possessions, or become famous, or gain power over others, etc. To be famous is not just to be loved by many anonymous people, as Freud put it; it is to (hope to) feel more real because our existence is acknowledged by so many others. The same applies to "status symbols." Many if not most of the people who own a Lexus, Mercedes Benz, etc. do so not just because it is such a fine car; they want to be recognized as the kind of person who drives a Lexus. In this way consumerist desires feed on our basic insecurity, which according to Buddhism is susceptible only to a spiritual solution, because it ultimately derives from an uncomfortable intuition of our selflessness, of our ungroundedness.

Since for Buddhism there was no original sin and no divine expulsion from a prelapsarian paradise, this situation turns out to be paradoxical: our worst problem is the deeply repressed fear that our groundlessness/ no-thing-ness is a problem. When I stop trying to fill up that hole at my core by vindicating or real-izing myself in some symbolic way, something can happens to it, as in the earlier example of working on the *mu* koan.

The sense-of-self cannot eliminate the sense-of-lack that inevitably haunts it, but from the awakened point of view my struggle to succeed cannot be successful because I am already grounded in the totality. Buddhism implies that I am groundless and ungroundable insofar as delusively feeling myself to be separate from the world; yet I have always been fully grounded insofar as I am interdependent with the world. With that conflation, the no-thing at my core is transformed from a sense of lack into a serenity that is imperturbable because there is no-thing to be perturbed. A mind that seeks to ground itself by fixating on something dooms itself to perpetual dissatisfaction, for the impermanence of all things means no such perch can be found. But since it is our sense of lack that compels us to seek such a perch, the end of our lack allows a change of perspective. The alienation of a reflexive sense-of-self always trying to fixate itself transforms into the freedom of an ab-solute mind that can become anything insofar as it does not need to become something.[6]

This implies that the deconstruction of self should strike at the source of much of our unethical behavior, because it weakens (and at its best uproots) many of the motivations that incline us to act unethically. Insofar as one's non-dual experience is genuine—insofar as one has truly let go of oneself—there should be less grasping at symbolic ways of trying to become real, because of the realization that there is no self which could become real or needs to become real. Money, for example, has obviously become one of our most important and compulsive forms of symbolic reality, but a truly awakened person does not need to ground herself in this symbolic form and so would not be motivated to seek it in the same way. The same point can be made about the desires for fame and power. "Because the public image comes to stand as the only valid certification

of being, the celebrity clings to his image as the rich man clings to his money—that is, as if to life itself" (Lapham, 1988, 230). In that case, however, the experience of non-duality should also undermine the need to become famous or powerful.

Yet not all of our behavior is motivated by a conscious or subconscious need to fill up our sense of lack and become real. Less symbolic and more sensual, instinctual cravings—for example, food, alcohol, and sex—might be less accessible to such pacification. Does this give us insight into the scandals that plagued most of the major US Zen centers some years ago, when teachers were discovered to have engaged in sexual and other misconduct?[7] The best-known examples seem to support my suspicion that the most troublesome problems have been alcohol abuse and, especially, sexual misconduct. This too is ironic, given the importance placed on abstaining from both in the Theravada tradition, where sex has always been considered the archetypal example of sensuality that needs to be overcome.

Then perhaps it is also no coincidence that sex and alcohol seem to be greater temptations for Zen and Tibetan teachers than for Theravada and *vipassana* teachers, whose meditative practices are based on the Pali tradition which emphasizes stricter observance of rules. Part of the ethical problem is that sex and alcohol seem to be private consensual matters that need not interfere with one's bodhisattva role. And it is true that we should not confuse social morality—what is customary—with the more general concern to help others that is the hallmark of a genuine teacher. But recently we have become more aware of the ways unequal power relationships and transference-vulnerability interfere with free consent and usually make teacher-student sex a form of abuse. Alcohol is the most popular drug in most societies, and for many people it becomes a necessity for day-to-day psychic survival. The fact that it is physically addicting means it is potentially dangerous to all those who indulge in large amounts, no matter how awakened or liberated they may otherwise be.

To sum up, Buddhist deconstructions of ethics have various implications. The duality between good and evil, along with our tendency to identify with the good, is dangerous insofar as it reinforces the delusion of separation from the other. A Buddhist deconstruction of self implies compassion for other beings, yet that compassion will manifest in different ways according to one's culture and character. That in itself is not necessarily a problem if we are sensitive to the "wegos" that threaten to reconstitute the duality of self and other on an institutional level. Realizing *anattā* diminishes one's sense-of-lack and thus works to undermine the compulsiveness of the ways we try to make ourselves real, which motivate much of our unethical behavior. More physical, instinctive sensuality, however, may be less susceptible to such a resolution. All of this suggests, at the very least, that it is unwise to abandon the lower truth of the ethical unless one has a clear awareness of the higher truth or archi-ethical that motivates bodhisattvas. The most important issue, finally, is not how much we have realized our non-duality with others but how much we are able to live it.[8]

Notes

1 I refer to the mythic medieval Christian saint, but the point also applies to some recent US presidents with the same name.
2 For more on this process, see Yasutani's "Commentary on the Koan *Mu*" in Kapleau, 1966, 71–82.
3 For examples, see Loy, 2003.
4 The Schwartz quotation was included in an email and I have been unable to trace the source.
5 Cf. the First Epistle of John, 4:18: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear: because fear hath torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love" (King James Version).
6 For more on this, see Loy, 1996.
7 To cite some notorious examples: Shunryu Suzuki's successor as abbot at the San Francisco Zen Center was forced to resign for having a sexual affair with at least one married student and for financial peccadillos; the founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles had numerous affairs with married and unmarried students; the abbot of the New York Zen Center was investigated by a reporter for the Village Voice, who claimed that he made sexual advances to students during *dokusan* (private interviews). The abbot of ZCLA was also an alcoholic; the influential Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa did not hide his habit of sleeping with many students and consuming large amounts of alcohol; and another well-known Tibetan teacher, who wrote a very popular book about life and death in the Tibetan tradition, settled out of court with a former woman student who claimed she had been sexually abused by him.
8 An earlier version of some parts of this chapter was published as "The lack of ethics and the ethics of lack in Buddhism," pp. 265–87 in Barnard and Kripal, 2002.

7
THE ETHICAL AND THE NON-ETHICAL
Nishida's methodic subversion[1]

Gereon Kopf

Introduction

Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), generally known as the founder of the philosophical movement called the Kyoto School, suggests a philosophical non-dualism he framed with a consistency rarely rivaled. From his first book-length work, *Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū*, in Nishida, 1988 (hereafter *NKZ*), 1, 1–199) to his last completed work, "The logic of Basho and the religious world view" ("Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan," *NKZ* 11, 371–464), Nishida labored to find a non-dual paradigm and to build on it a philosophical system that responds to the fundamental metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and soteriological questions. The philosophy of Nishida Kitarō thus constitutes a wonderful example of how a non-dualist ethics can be conceived and what it can contribute to the contemporary ethical discourse.

However, despite Nishida's frequent use of terms such as "the good" *(zen)* and "morality" *(dōtoku),* it is rather difficult to find a systematic ethics in his work. Or, more to the point, whoever is on the search for a systematic ethics in Nishida's work or for solutions to concrete ethical problems stands to be severely disappointed. The sections in Nishida's collected works that are directly dedicated to ethics are surprisingly few. Nishida discusses the notion of the Good in his *Inquiry into the Good* and individual chapters of his *Art and Morality* (*Geijutsu to dōtoku; NKZ* 3, 237–545), and ethical approaches in the *Inquiry into the Good* and his "Outline of an ethics" ("Rinrigaku sōan," *NKZ* 16, 149–267). Otherwise he weaves the notion of "ethics," "morality," or the "good" in his philosophical reflections without providing an in-depth discussion or analysis of the definition of goodness or the criteria for moral behavior. Not only does Nishida dedicate the greater parts of his discussion of ethics—with the possible exclusion of his "Outline of an ethics"—to the rejection of all ethical theories known to him; the few positive statements of his that can be possibly identified as ethics are either disappointing such as his definition of the ethical as the "unifying activity" *(tōitsu sayō),* "unifying power" *(tōitsu chikara)* or the "union point of the true, the good, and the beautiful" (*shinzenbi no gōitten; NKZ* 3, 349), on the one hand, or outrageous in that they seem to blur the delineations of good and evil, god and the devil, on the other. While Nishida insists that he "does not claim that good end evil cannot be differentiated" (*NKZ* 11, 405), this does not prevent him from asserting the "self-identity of the contradictories good and evil" *(zen to aku to no mujunteki jiko dōitsu) (ibid.)* and from proposing that "god must be devilish in one aspect" (*NKZ* 11, 404). Rather than to propose an ethics, these statements can be read to state, to paraphrase Nishida's own terminology, that "there is no absolute differentiation between the ethical and the non-ethical."[2] While

comments like these are indicative of philosophical non-dualism and seem in some sense even commonsensical, they do not really clarify what Nishida identifies as the criteria of good and evil or whether his philosophy is capable of rendering any basis for ethical reflections whatsoever. Of course these problems are not restricted to Nishida's ethics, but apply more loosely to his non-dualistic approach in general.

So how do we have to understand Nishida's non-dualism? Most interpreters of Nishida read his philosophy as an explication of Buddhist or even "Oriental" thought, on the one side, or as an example of German Idealist absolutism gone awry[3] on the other. In some sense, both criticisms are not without their justification: the former since Nishida's philosophy, especially as developed in his later works (that is, the works starting with his 1939 *Philosophical Essays Volume 3*), either derives inspiration from or at least displays similarities with selected Mahāyāna Buddhist texts; the latter because Nishida responds to and utilizes the language of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German philosophy. But he stands too much in the debt of both traditions to allow that either of the two traditional responses be satisfactorily argued. Rather it seems to me that Nishida uses the non-dual paradigm he borrows from the writings of Shinran, Dōgen, and that of selected Chinese Zen masters to subvert[4] philosophical conceptions developed in the European philosophical tradition, in which he places himself. I prefer the term "systematic subversion" to the term "deconstruction," since Nishida does not utilize the hermeneutic method Derrida outlines and develops,[5] but rather subverts traditional conceptual structures by exposing the "contradiction" and ambiguity inherent in conceptual language.

While I do not intend to imply in any way a deeper kinship between Nishida's philosophy and the deconstructionist project, I believe that a consideration of some similarities between these two disparate philosophical approaches can not only shed a new light on Nishida philosophy but also discloses the traces of ethical reflection and, subsequently, the basics for an ethics, a non-dual ethics to be exact, in Nishida's writing. The terminological foundation of this ethics is his notion of the "unifying power" in the *Inquiry into the Good* (1911), the union point of the true, the good, and the beautiful in his *Art and Morality* (1923), and the self-identity of the absolute contradictories good and evil in *The Logic of Basho and the Religious World View* (1945). In his later work, even in his preface to a later edition of *Inquiry into the Good* (1936), Nishida agrees that his earlier formulations, especially his notion of the "unifying activity," were too psychological and thus in need of revision.[6] Subsequently, Nishida consistently offered new versions of the non-dual paradigm until he settled in 1938 on the self-identity of the absolute contradictories. This concept embodies the non-dual paradigm most clearly. Nishida's conception of the "unifying power" is nevertheless essential to my discussion since it illustrates Nishida's subversion of traditional ethics.

1 Nishida's approach to traditional ethics[7]

The first blueprint of Nishida's approach to ethics can be found in the third section of his first book-length volume, *Inquiry into the Good*, which was published in 1911. Here, Nishida outlines the ethical project as follows:

> The place of the true criteria (of the good) is to be found in the internal necessity of consciousness…. The philosophers adhering to a heteronomous ethics seek for the criteria of good and evil outside. However, this way it is impossible to explain why we are supposed to do the good. The rationalistic theory decides about the standard for good and evil based on one internal activity of consciousness, reason. While this marks one step up from heteronomous ethics, reason is not the activity that should choose one's will. In analogy to Hoffding's observation that consciousness begins and ends with the activity of will, will is even more fundamental (to consciousness) than the activity of abstract understanding. The latter does not bring forth the former, on the contrary, the former controls the latter. When hedonism suggests that the difference between emotion and will is one of difference in accent of almost identical phenomena, this marks an even deeper development. However, as I said before, since pleasure is something that arises from the fulfillment of the transcendental demand of consciousness, the transcendental demand such as so-called impulses and instincts must be even more fundamental than the emotions of pleasure and pain. Therefore it is clear that the explanation of what is good must be found in the essence of will itself. Will constitutes the fundamental unifying activity of consciousness; as such it is the power that unifies the fundament of reality directly.
>
> (*NKZ* 1, 142–3)

This excerpt reveals three fundamental characteristics of Nishida's approach to ethics. First, to Nishida, ethics comprises the quest for the criteria to distinguish between good and evil, meritorious and that which is not meritorious. Second, surveying the ethical systems developed throughout the history of philosophy—in accordance with the general sentiment in Meiji Japan, Nishida reserves the term "philosophy" *(tetsugaku)* in general to the European and American philosophical traditions that have their roots in classical Greek philosophy—Nishida identifies two basic definitions of the good which he refers to as heteronomous and autonomous ethics. Heteronomous ethics Nishida calls any ethical theory that identifies an authority external to the self such as an autocrat or god as the source for our moral criteria. Autonomism, on the contrary, seeks the source of morality inside the self. In short, heteronomism reduces morality to power and thus fails to provide an ethics; a moral theory that claims that even the moral authority, be it god or the government, is bound by an independent notion of goodness, locates morality outside of an external authority and thus cannot be called heteronomism. Similarly, it is impossible to argue for a universally applicable morality if one locates the moral authority inside the self, as the various forms of autonomism suggest. In other words, autonomism always requires additional external criteria of what constitutes the good, and subsequently fails to provide a satisfactory moral theory. One model that seems to resist this categorization is the notion of a moral law, since the moral law, in some sense, is simultaneously immanent in and transcendent to the self. To Nishida the moral self does not create but rather discovers this law. Nishida argues that the weakness of this moral theory lies in the fact that it is external to the emotional life of the self and thus produces a state of alienation. However, Nishida subsumes the moral law under the category of

autonomous ethics since the arbitrator of even a universal moral law is the rational self. Be that as it may, Nishida strives to show the internal inconsistencies in both heteronomism and autonomism in order to promote his own position, which he calls "action theory" *(katsudōsetsu)*,[8] taking as its foundation the principle of the "unifying power."

As this brief outline already indicates, Nishida's agenda and strategy differ markedly from traditional ethical approaches. Of course, there is nothing radical about his format, but rather Nishida seems to follow here the standard pattern of any philosopher who wants to introduce a new philosophical position:[9] discussion of the problem; presentation of the existing approaches and their flaws; and introduction of the new position that does not fall into the trap of its predecessors. What surprises in his approach, however, is that while he discusses the philosophers whose ethical theories have become the standard representatives and approaches in the field of philosophical ethics, Nishida subsumes them under his own idiosyncratic categories. Aristotle is not mentioned as a representative of a virtue ethics; nor Kant of deontology; instead Nishida subsumes all major ethical theories under the categories of heteronomism and autonomism. On first sight this seems rather surprising and reductive; however, a careful reading of his work reveals that Nishida's philosophical approach is more systematic and even methodological than it may seem on first sight. For example, his discussion of the traditional notions of "god" and "reality" reverberate the categories of heteronomism and autonomism. More to the point, Nishida seems to suggest that philosophers traditionally conceived of god as either theistic or pantheistic (*NKZ* 1, 173–8), of the essence of reality as either materialistic or idealistic (15, 134–6),[10] and of the quantity of all existents as either along the lines of pluralism or monism (*ibid.*, 142–58). It is very clear that Nishida does not even attempt to give a comprehensive overview of traditional theologies or ontologies. Rather he strives to expose what he conceives to be the dualistic bias of traditional philosophy,[11] at the center of which he identifies the dichotomy between internality and externality. From the background of this diagnosis, Nishida then proceeds to advance his own non-dualistic position as expressed in his conception of the "pure experience" as "unifying power" in his *Inquiry into the Good* and his notion of the "self-identity of the absolute contradictories" *(zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu)* in his later work. In other words, Nishida's discussion of ethics and his proposal to conceive of ethics as action theory achieves two primary goals: first, it attempts to refute the two basic categories of all preceding ethical theories as well as the metaphysical structure on which they are built; second, it proposes a non-dual ethics. In the next two sections I will focus on the subversive aspect of Nishida philosophy, in the second half of the chapter on its constructive aspect.

2 Nishida's non-dualism

The goal of Nishida throughout most of his writing is to find the most fundamental standpoint of philosophy and to develop a consistent philosophical system from it. In analogy to his treatment of ethics, Nishida develops his non-dual paradigm in three steps. First, he categorizes all existing philosophical positions on a given topic in two basic categories, one representing the objectivist standpoint, the other the subjectivist one.

Second, he discusses objectivism and subjectivism in general terms as the two philosophical prototypes, only to, however, reject both of these standpoints as internally inconsistent and flawed. Ultimately, he is not interested in developing an ethics, metaphysics, or a political philosophy, but the main purpose of his discussion of any philosophical issue is to propose a third, non-dual, standpoint. The issues at stake as well as his own philosophical system are secondary to his writings. Nishida argues for this non-dual paradigm negatively *vis-à-vis* what he identifies as objectivism and subjectivism. This means that Nishida's three-step approach constitutes the key to his understanding of non-dualism in particular and to his philosophical system, including his ethics, in general.

Throughout his work, Nishida uses different variations of his threefold model. Since the differences among them, however, are mostly a matter of terminology, it is possible to argue that all versions disclose the same fundamental structure. The first category implies a dualistic metaphysics that is advanced by positivistic language and indicates objectivism; the category synonymous with subjectivism suggests a monism and utilizes a rhetoric reminiscent of the *via negativa;* the final category evokes a radical non-dualism. Despite its obvious affinity to the famous Zen saying "mountains are mountains, mountains are not mountains, mountains are really mountains,"[12] Nishida is careful to avoid possible mystical connotations and reserves his threefold model almost exclusively to his discussion and evaluation of philosophical paradigms and comportments. While variations on the theme dualism/monism/non-dualism occur frequently throughout Nishida's work, the best illustration can be found in a rarely quoted section of his lectures on "Religious Studies" *(Shūkyōgaku)*. Here, Nishida utilizes the analogy of a play to illustrate why he believes that non-dualism is necessary:

> The religious value (that is, the third kind of value) depends on whether or not it is possible to maintain the co-existence of the former two values [that is the intellectual/aesthetic and the moral] in the present moment. We can discover this religious value in the place where the fate of the other (intellectual, aesthetic, and moral) values is determined. In the great play of life we participate as both actors and spectators. If we were simply spectators facing the unfolding of the play, our standpoint would be purely intellectual and aesthetical. Again, if we were simply performers we would sink into our roles and there would be no place from which the unfolding of the play could be observed. But since we are both actors and spectators, we act and, at the same time, observe the unfolding of the play.
> (*NKZ* 14, 291)

The charm of this allegory lies in the fact that it is not only accessible but also clearly illustrates how Nishida conceives of the three most fundamental philosophical positions. The objectivist can be compared to the audience of a play who, as detached onlookers, can analyze and interpret the play but are removed from the activity of the play. The detachment of the audience from the play in Nishida's analogy symbolizes not the physical removal of the objectivist from reality but rather the ability to engage in abstract thinking to construct observer-independent knowledge. Objectivism is the standpoint of speculation and abstract thought insofar as the thinker imagines him or herself outside of

the world reflecting on the world as impartial onlooker. This attitude, which I have called elsewhere "methodological retreat" (Kopf, 2001, 167), constructs a world that is dualistic insofar as it distinguishes between the play of reality and the subjective observer, and posits independent entities. The actors, on the other hand, participate in the play but, subsequently, lose the distance of the observer necessary to analyze it. In other words, subjectivism assumes the standpoint of engagement and replaces the separation of self and world with a dynamic unity where the individual members are not eternally separate from each other as well as the world and devoid of actions, but where they dissolve in it. As in the case of ethics, Nishida rejects both models, objectivism and subjectivism alike, as abstract and, ultimately, untenable, because we, at the same time, participate in the play of reality and have the capacity to analyze it. In other words, Nishida suggests that the fact that human beings tend to be engaged in reality and are capable of abstract and higher-level thinking requires a non-dual paradigm.

In order to conceive of a world in which objectivism and subjectivism live side by side, where persons are neither exclusively individual nor exclusively social, where bodies are neither exclusively marked as objects nor submerge themselves in an all-elusive subjectivity, Nishida frames his non-dual paradigm in what seems to be paradoxical language or even as "self-identity of absolute contradictories." In this sense, Nishida advances the notion of the self-identity of past and future in the present—to be exact, as the movement "from the present to the present" *(genzai kara genzai e)*, of affirmation and negation, and of the many and the one. Nishida uses phrases that link opposites with the term *"soku"* such as "affirmation-*soku*-negation" in order to explicate his non-dual paradigm. Since *soku* is without any English equivalent, these concepts are notoriously difficult to explain. In short, they are aimed at breaking the dualistic paradigm without, however, falling into a oneness. As Maraldo has said rather succinctly, *soku* indicates "[n]ot merely a juxtaposition…[n]ot merely a relativity…[n]ot a transformation…[n]ot, for example, transcendent in one respect, and immanent in another,… Rather a simultaneous co-habitation of a space…a place itself hidden by the terms and revealed by following their self-negation" (Maraldo, 2003, 40). *"Soku"* does not signify an equation of opposites; it indicates that a term cannot be conceived of independent of its opposite and, even stronger, that a concept obscures what it is supposed to signify and that the signified can only be illuminated in the light of the self-negation of the signifier. For this reason I will translate *soku* hereafter as "and-yet," as in "affirmation-and-yet-negation." On the one side, his famous *soku*-phraseology explicates primarily his conviction that a complete philosophical standpoint has to involve both aspects. It is for this reason that Nishida defines the actual as that which constitutes the "one-and-yet-many" *(issokuta)* and the "affirmation-and-yet-negation" *(kōtei soku hitei)*.

In a second sense, however, Nishida argues that any philosophical paradigm that allows the inclusion of two opposite standpoints must include its own negation. Such an internal negation not only includes both the principles of internality and otherness; at the same time, it functions to provide what Nishitani Keiji would call the "homeground"[13] for the two opposite standpoints it supports and includes. To Nishida, ultimately, this "homeground," that is, that which contains its own negation and otherness inside, cannot but constitute the absolute, that is, the absolute that includes relativity as its own negation. In his own words:

> The absolute becomes truly absolute when it faces nothingness…. However, it (the absolute) does not face something outside itself as an object, but what we call “facing absolute nothingness” implies that it faces itself as self-contradiction…. That which faces itself negates itself…. Insofar as it negates itself outside itself and opposes itself, it is not the absolute. The absolute contains its own absolute self-negation inside itself.
>
> (*NKZ* 11, 397)

In some sense, his discussion of ethical theories and criteria leads Nishida to propose a non-dual paradigm that, in the most benevolent reading, links opposites such as affirmation and negation, and, in the worst-case scenario, postulates a paradox.

3 Nishida philosophy as systematic subversion

How can we understand Nishida’s confounding *soku*-phrases and interpret his non-dualism? While traditionally commentators—supporters such as Nishitani, Ueda Shizuteru, and Abe Masao as well as critics such as Tanabe Hajime, Takahashi Satomi, and Nobechi Tōyō alike—interpret Nishida’s non-dual paradigm as some kind of mysticism or absolutism, I believe this interpretation is not necessary. To be sure, not only has James Heisig (2004) made a case for reading Nishida philosophy in the light of medieval mystics; Nishida himself declares an affinity with mystics such as Jacob Bhoeme more than once (*NKZ* 1, 365–6; 2, 180–2; 15:163). However, I believe that there is a second aspect to Nishida philosophy. To be exact, I think the argument can be made that Nishida’s philosophical project not only shares with the philosophical deconstruction of Jacques Derrida the Cartesian *cogito* and any form of conceptual dualism as the primary targets of their criticism, but both define their primary paradigms in similar ways.

While I do not want to suggest that Nishida’s philosophy can be understood as deconstruction in the Derridean sense but rather refer to Nishida’s project as systematic subversion of traditional philosophical categories, it is impossible to deny some obvious similarities between these two philosophical approaches. For example, when Derrida explains that his *différance* “remains undecided *between* active and passive” (Derrida, 1982, 9) and constitutes “a system that no longer tolerates the opposition of activity and passivity, nor that of cause and effect, or of determination and indetermination” (*ibid.*, 16), his words strongly echo Nishida’s non-dualistic terminology introduced in the last paragraph of the preceding section. Martin Srajek’s discussion of Derrida’s *différance* further witnessess this similarity when he explains that “différance will always be expressed as ‘différance is’ and ‘différance is not’” (Srajek, 1998, 237) and thus evokes the dialectic of affirmation and negation which is almost ubiquitous in Nishida’s writing. In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, both Nishida and Derrida identify Plato’s *khora* as the inspiration for their conceptions of a “third species” (Derrida, 1992c, 104) that destabilizes the dualisms of traditional European philosophy. Once again, Derrida’s language strongly resembles Nishida’s formulation of the non-dual paradigm when he

describes *khora:* "As it is neither this nor that…one may speak as *if* it were a joint participant in both. *Neither/nor*…both this and that" (*ibid.,* 105).

Nishida's non-dual paradigm discloses an affinity not only with Derrida's *différance* but also with other philosophers influenced by Derrida, such as Mark Taylor and George Bennington. Like Nishida, Taylor eschews the priority of either the past, beginnings in Taylor's case, or the future, Taylor's endings, in favor of the presence as the locus of philosophy, rejects the extremes for the "middle" as the "divine milieu," and favors a language that is highly paradoxical. In this sense Taylor's "relativity of presence and absence" (Taylor, 1984, 110) and the "unending play of presence and absence in the trace" echoes Nishida's dialectic of affirmation and negation. Similarly, his assertion that "the present is never a *nunc stans* but is ceaseless transition" (*ibid.,* 114) cannot but evoke Nishida's definition of time as the transition "from the present to the present." In addition, Taylor's statements about the self or, more appropriately selflessness, also could be Nishida's, whether it is the observation that the self "*'in relating itself to its own self relates itself to an other'* (sic)" (*ibid.,* 134) or the straightforward rejection of the notion of an individual in comments such as "then the subject is both *desubstantialized* and *deindividualized*" (*ibid.,* 135). Finally, when Taylor sets out to describe the "divine milieu," that is, the passage where theological writing occurs, it seems almost as if he were citing Nishida: Taylor defines the "divine milieu" as that which "neither is nor is not; it is insofar as it is not and is not insofar as it is" (*ibid.,* 117). At the same time, it seems more than feasible to describe Nishida's endless dialectics of the opposites in Taylor's terms as "play of differences" (*ibid.,* 116). Of course there are significant differences between Taylor and Nishida: the former talks about "identity in difference" the latter about "internal negation," that is, about "difference in identity"; the former asserts that the "divine milieu is neither fully present nor absent" (*ibid.,* 117), while the latter leaves no doubt that god is fully manifested in what Nishida calls the "eternal present"; the former fashions a theology of writing by writing theology while the latter is concerned with the expression if not embodiment of god in the present. At any rate, I think that this brief comparison between Taylor and Nishida demonstrates that paradoxes do no necessarily imply absolutism or mysticism but can also indicate subversive tendencies reminiscent of postmodern strategies.

In addition to the similarities between Taylor and Nishida, there is a second reason for interpreting Nishida's non-dualism as systematic subversion with postmodern tendencies; this clue lies in Nishida's writings themselves. Despite all his emphasis on the absolute, the examples and terminology Nishida applies at the end of his last completed work, *The Logic of Basho and the Religious World View,* define the absolute as neither transcendent nor as absolute *qua* absolute, that is, an absolute that excludes and negates the relative, but rather as that which is "absolute-and-yet-relative." More specifically, he uses neologism such as the "eschatology of the everyday" and the "penetration of the everyday" *(byōjōtei)* to explicate this non-dual paradigm. For example, he cites the nineteenth case of the *Mumonkan,* proclaiming that "the everyday mind is the way" (*NKZ* 11, 424, *T* 48.2005.295b) to illustrate the notion of the depth of everydayness. Another explanation of the depth of everydayness is a citation from the *Rinzairoku,* which he repeats verbatim four times on the ten pages where he discusses this concept. Rinzai's *dictum* reads roughly as follows: "The Buddha dharma is not useful nor does it accomplish anything; it constitutes nothing but the activities of everydayness; have a

shit take a piss; put on your cloths, eat and drink, retire when tired" (*NKZ* 11, 424, T 47.1985.496c). The former illustration demonstrates the non-dual character of the depth of everydayness, while the latter emphasizes that the transcendent is not separate but manifests itself in rather profane activities. However, to Nishida there are no differences between these two dimensions of *byōjōtei*. To be exact, most of the times Nishida uses this famous line from the *Rinzairoku,* he is quick to add that "have a shit take a piss; put on your cloths, eat and drink" has to be supplemented with the transcendental dimension. To assert this transcendental dimension, Nishida quickly adds another line from the *Rinzairoku:* "The heart of the dharma has no form; it traverses the ten directions; when it is in the eye, we say we see; when it is in the ear, we say we hear" (*NKZ* 9, 333). Nishida employs this terminology in order to guard against a reduction of his non-dual paradigm to the profane and vulgar, on the one side, and to emphasize its infinite and "bottomless" (*NKZ* 11, 449) depth. To indicate this depth of the everyday that is transcendent-and-yet-immanent, Nishida uses his *soku*-phrases or their equivalents and describes *byōjōtei* such as that which is internal-and-yet-external (*ibid.,* 452) and "that which is superficial while being deep, near while being far, and small while being big" (*ibid.,* 453). In addition, he asserts that "therein, the wise person and the fool, the important and the trivial thing are one" *(ibid.)*. This means that the absolute does not exist independent from the relative, but rather is fully but not completely expressed in the relative realm. A complete expression would require an infinite amount of instances and is, subsequently, infinitely deferred. If, however, Nishida contends that the one absolute god is fully but not completely expressed in an infinite number of instances, he does imply that the complete expression of the absolute requires an eternity and that the process of this expression in knowledge, art, and morality is one of infinite deepening. Framed in these terms, Nishida's absolute-and-yet-relative does not seem to be that far removed from Taylor's "divine milieu [which] is neither fully present nor absent."

As in the case of deconstruction, Nishida does not so much reject European philosophy and its disciplines but rather undermines them.[14] And not unlike Derrida's suggestion in his "Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy" (1992b), Nishida's philosophy does not imply the end of philosophy in the sense that his system abrogates all preceding attempts, but rather a *transgression* in Mark Taylor's sense, that is, philosophical writing that constitutes the markings in between a beginning and the end. Now I admit that this contention must sound outrageous to readers familiar with Nishida's philosophy in particular and the philosophy of the Kyoto School in general. To be clear, Nishida never described his philosophy in these terms, but, to the contrary, seemed to have believed that the most fundamental paradigm of philosophy and a standpoint of what Masao Abe would later term the "positionless position" (Abe, 1995, 47) is not only graspable in theory but, moreover, is expressed in the various incarnations of the non-dual paradigm advanced in his philosophy. His style of writing further implies that he believed he had solved the "fundamental problem of philosophy." Finally, Nishida is not a deconstructionist; to the contrary, he is committed to the modernist project of constructing a systematic philosophy of universals and his terminology seems to imply an idealist absolutism a la Hegel. However, as I have argued above, there is a second side to Nishida's philosophy. Nishida's description of philosophy as an infinite process of transformation that is located in the present and marks the transition from the present to the present does echo Taylor's notion of theology as open-ended process and continuous

passage. I thus believe that if one takes Nishida's vision of a radical non-dualism seriously, one cannot but detect an affinity between the non-dualism of his mature philosophy and the deconstructionist project. Therefore I would like to argue that only if Nishida's philosophy is to be understood as a radical non-dualism and as systematic subversion of traditional category systems can his philosophy of the *self-identity of absolute contradictories (zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu)* and especially his *self-identity of absolute contradictories of good and evil* be meaningfully applied to ethical reflection. A philosophy of systematic subversion based on Nishida's paradigm does not reject the ethical but rather discloses what Geoffrey Bennington calls the "archi-ethical."

In his essay "Deconstruction and ethics," Bennington outlines what he calls the "archi-ethical" or an ethics that "survives deconstruction" (Bennington 2000, 34). It is the declared goal of his project to argue that deconstruction does not destroy or erase ethics. Rather, while "'ethics' cannot fail to be a theme or an object of deconstruction" *(ibid.)*, "deconstructive thought *in general* [sic] has an ethical import" and "will have *specific* [sic] interventions to make in the traditional metaphysical vocabulary of ethics" (*ibid.*, 35). Bennington thus avoids the questions posed to deconstructionists *ad nauseam*, whether the hermeneutic method of deconstruction provides a foundation for an ethical system, and rather focuses on the implications deconstructive thinking has for ethical reasoning. In some sense, this shift is as ingenious as it is necessary, because deconstruction is not a method of ethical reasoning. At the same time, its radical criticism of metaphysical assumptions cannot but affect any attempt of defining goodness and evil or of delineating criteria for ethical behavior. It is for this reason that Bennington forsakes the quest for a deconstructionist ethics for the discussion of the effect deconstruction has on ethics.

It is this shift in focus that makes Bennington's criteria interesting for a study of the ethical or the archi-ethical in Nishida since Nishida equally employs a method of subversion to reinterpret what Bennington calls the "metaphysical vocabulary of ethics." In the case of ethics, Nishida specifically challenges the notions of internality and externality, self, and world; more generally, his non-dualism subverts the very notions of affirmation and negation, absolute and relative, and, subsequently, the very metaphysical framework on the basis of which ethical reflections are to be made. In Bennington's terminology, after Nishida has demonstrated the inherent incapability of the vocabulary of internality and externality, selfhood and otherness, that is, after the subversion of an ethics that is built on traditional metaphysical vocabulary, he discovers the archi-ethical that survives this very subversion. So what I am looking for, when I read Nishida on the search for an ethics, is not so much a value system that is based on the inherent notions of good and evil—these notions have disappeared in the subversion that reveals the self-identity of contradictories—but rather a conceptual framework that nourishes a sense of the ethical or, at least, has implications for ethical reflections. In this sense, Bennington's shift is able to shed light on the effect Nishida's systematic subversion has on ethics and will allow me to point towards the archi-ethical Nishida's criticism lays bare. In Nishida's case the archi-ethical is disclosed by the non-dual paradigm that emerges when the dualistic structures of traditional metaphysics and ethics are shown to be inconsistent.

4 Self-identity of good and evil

In his last complete work, *The Logic of Basho and the Religious World View,* Nishida takes his non-dual paradigm to its utmost consequence when he subverts the difference between good and evil, god and devil. This philosophical move, however, does not negate the ethical but rather discloses the archi-ethical.

> When I say that god includes its own self-negation and that it faces its own self-negation, I do not imply that god faces a world without god or the natural world. The world of mere nature is the world constructed by atheism…. The world that is truly the self-negation of god must be the world of the devil. It negates the conception that god is a ruler or an absolute subject. In some sense this is the world of conflict. What we call nature is the utmost limit of the self-negation of the authoritarian god. It is the historical world in which the subject determines the environment and vice versa. It is not the world that constitutes the limits of the self-negation of god, that is, the subject, that is, the god of reason. This may sound irrational, but the truly absolute god must be in one sense the devil. In this sense it is omniscient and omnipotent. This is the god that asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son. It is the god that requests the negation of the personality. A god that simply fights evil even if it conquers evil is a relative god. The transcendent god of the highest good is an abstraction. The absolute god must include its own negation in itself; it is the god that "trans-descends" to absolute evil. Only the truly absolute god saves the evil ones. The highest form must form the lowest matter. Absolute agape extends to absolutely evil persons. God hides in the heart of evil people in inverse correlation. The god of punishment is not the absolute god. This does not mean that it is impossible to distinguish between good and evil. Something that is thought as the god of highest perfection does not correlate with the reality of our souls. It is the god of object logic and speculation…. [t]he absolute god is, as I said before, the self-identity of the absolute contradictories; the self, wherein god is reflected, constitutes the self-identity of the absolute contradictories of good and evil.
>
> (*NKZ* 11, 404–5)

In this paragraph, Nishida pairs statements which could be adopted by theist theologians such as "the absolute descends to ultimate evil" and "the battleground, where god and the devil fight, is the heart of the human individual" with statements that are more clearly non-dualistic such as "the truly absolute god must be evil in some respect" and "the absolute…truly forms the self-identity of good and evil." The first set of assertions very clearly emphasizes that in the historical world good and evil are in conflict, while the second set seems to indicate that the boundaries between good and evil are not as rigid as they seem at first sight; it rather destabilizes the conceptions of good and evil respectively. This raises a couple of questions: Do these assertions really constitute a

juxtaposition or can they be reconciled within Nishida's larger philosophical framework? How does Nishida conceive of this battle between god and devil? What metaphysical status does Nishida assign to good and evil?

An application of Nishida's model of the three worlds (paraphrased earlier as objectivism, subjectivism, and non-dualism) will illuminate his conceptions of good and evil. Defined in opposition, good and evil constitute merely abstract ideas in the world of knowledge. Even if one extends this dualistic structure of the world of objectivity to the world of conditionality, the individual considers itself either justified against an unjust world or as a sinner fallen from the world of goodness. The world of engagement, however, belies this abstract opposition between good and evil. Not only are these concepts relative to each other—good is defined over and against evil and vice versa—and not only does a totality obviously include both good and evil, but the very idea of the world of engagement undermines the rigid conceptions of good and evil themselves. The activity in which the individual engages with the world and the world that transforms itself is neither good nor evil; good and evil are secondary categories, judgments applied within the world of knowledge and at least one step removed from the "unifying activity" that constitutes the world of engagement. If the concepts of good and evil can be applied to the world of engagement, it is only in so far as that which promotes unity and totality is good and that which obstructs it is evil.

Of course these statements are bound to provoke incredulity and rage. How can Nishida say that activities are neutral? How can he deny that rape, genocide, torture are evil? And those questions are valid. However, even the fact that Nishida never explicitly denounces horrible atrocities does not imply that he justifies them. In fact, Nishida in general does fail to discuss concrete implications of his ethics and to apply it to the historical realities of his own time. However, he does not erase the notion of evil. For that matter, neither does he justify atrocities. While his philosophy can be accused of being too abstract, it cannot to be accused of justifying evil.[15] First, his philosophy does not remain on the level of the second world where everything is swallowed by the one totality, but he adds as a third layer the historical world. This is the world where good and evil collide. Furthermore, more than in the case of any other topic, Nishida emphasizes the ambiguity of the historical world with regard to the problem of evil. He consistently insists that good and evil always will be in conflict with each other and that there is no resolution. Interestingly enough, Nishida's prototype of this ethical conflict in the historical world is not an example from the number of mystics he usually falls back on, but from Shinran, who insisted that his own nature was corrupted, and Dimitri Karamasov, the one of the three Karamasov brothers who wasted the family fortune and functioned in Dostoevsky's novel as metaphorical antithesis to the pious Aloyisius, on the one side, and the philosopher Ivan, on the other. This more than anything else should bring it home that at least Nishida's later philosophy is not mystical but rather down to earth. The observation that life is an eternal struggle between good and evil, which seems to be more realistic than anything else, leads Nishida to another conclusion, namely that human existence is inherently demonic.

Nishida uses the term "demonic" in the last six years of his life. He started to introduce it together with Plato's "daimon" but later acknowledged his direct indebtedness to Goethe and the indirect influence of Nietzsche's notion of the "Dionysiac" in *Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)*. It is in the same work

that Nietzsche also refers to the demonic. Nishida uses the term about 30 times, mostly, however, in his *Philosophical Essays 4* and *5*. On the last pages of his “The problem of Japanese culture,” Nishida makes it clear that the demonic is not equivalent to the devil or even god, for that matter. In these two volumes written in the early 1940s, Nishida completes his philosophy of history and his treatises on the “National entity” (“Kokutai”; *NKZ* 12, 392–416). He uses the term “demonic” generally with three meanings. First, it describes the basic principle and “driving energy” of history: “The self-expression of the world of the self-identity of contradictories is paradoxical and can be thought in the words of Goethe as the demonic” (*NKZ* 10, 61). Second, it refers to the individual’s attitude towards the totality and the subject’s towards the environment: “Individuality constitutes the demonic power to form history” (*ibid.,* 379). In a third step he applies this thinking to the one example of the specific, namely the ethnic community: “The ethnic community constitutes the demonic power to form history” (*NKZ* 12, 421). In short, Nishida defines the demonic as the contradiction at the bottom of history that cannot be resolved and as the potential of the individual specific—be it an individual person or an individual country—to make history. This is interesting for two reasons: Nishida not only terms the existential ambiguity of human existence the demonic; he does so at a time when he, in his diary entries, complained about a nation losing itself in a destructive war and ideologues spun out of control.[16] While it would be certainly interesting to probe the political implications of this, albeit tangential, comment, I would like to focus on the former observation. To Nishida, the self-identity of the absolute contradictories is demonic. It is demonic because of its potential for evil. But he does not translate this potential for evil on to a cosmic scale—that would be inconsistent with either an absolutist approach that dissolves good and evil or with Nishida’s own approach to see the absolute in the individual moments of self-negation—but he locates the demonic in conflict. In his attempts to write a historical or political philosophy in the early 1940s, he refers to this as conflict between nations and cultures, and in his final work, the conflict within the human soul. In his historical and political writings it is often difficult to see whether this emphasis on conflict is descriptive, normative, or, since he is working within a non-dualistic system, as descriptiveand-yet-normative, normative-and-yet-descriptive. Is Nishida saying the historical world is a world of conflict or does he imply that it is supposed to be one? In some sense, Nishida seems to advocate, albeit implicitly, a middle path between the two extremes. On the one hand, even at his ethical best, Nishida refrains from making normative claims; on the other, he clearly emphasizes the reality of this conflict and the necessity to face it and not dissolve it into easy alternatives of either this or that from. But why is this conflict demonic?

Nishida does not answer this question. He does not even treat it in the non-dual fashion to frame a phrase of the kind of a demonic-and-yet-angelic as he usually does. Textually, the term suffers the fate of many borrowed technical terms Nishida became infatuated with, played with for a while, and then discarded for his own *soku*-phrases. But since it does seem important that he uses the term as frequently as he does, I would like to offer my own interpretation. The power of history is demonic because it lies in an ambiguity and reveals an inherent tension. We human beings tend to avoid ambiguities because they are uncomfortable, but the fundamental tension at the bottom of history cannot be resolved. It is this tension that can be felt when an individual person or nation faces the world. This interaction between individual and totality is always ambiguous.

Turning against this totality is in some sense evil; but it is also necessary. Individual persons and individual nations are constructed entities and if they act as individuals, they, in some sense, act against others. This creates the sense of the demonic in two ways. First, from a psychological perspective, to the individual who defines him/herself as individual against the rest of the world, this world will always be demonic and appear as the nondescript *"das man,"* in the Heideggerian sense, in nightmares and paranoid fantasies. By the same token, the solipsisms, in which any radical individualism results, lead to fantasies of omnipotence that in themselves become a nightmare for the others if acted upon. Paradoxically, the ambiguity of human existence is demonic in so far as the failure to bear it will have demonic consequences, regardless of whether it results in paranoia or self-aggrandizement.

What does this have to do with ethics? The ethical dimension of the demonic lies in the paradox that the creation of a binary framework that separates self and world, good and evil, makes ethics necessary; living with this ambiguity does not. After his reflections on the morally ambiguous nature of god and the self, Nishida does not proceed to a discussion of formal ethics but rather cites Buddhist thinkers randomly in order to establish some framework of religious thought and practice. Nishida is not interested in ethics because a theory of ethics would be restricted to the world of knowledge and the practice of morality to the world of engagement. I would like to take this idea one step further: It is possible to justify, as Nishida has been accused of, theft, murder, and apparently even torture from an individual perspective for the protection of "our country." If the concept of the individual and the country is de-substantialized and contextualized within the global community of many individual persons and countries, theft, murder, and torture are more difficult to enact. What Nishida attempts, however, is not an ethic that as a discourse within the world of knowledge is bound to one perspective and excludes others, but a practice that is rooted in the ambiguity of the individual-and-yet-communal and the communaland-yet-individual. Such a reasoning would emphasize questions such as "How can I act as an individual so that others can act as an individual?" with the awareness that self and other both constitute the one community in which we live. This awareness should make it impossible to justify theft, murder, rape, and torture. Once again, ethics, to Nishida, is context based and thus cannot be universalized; what can be universalized is the principle of the one-and-yet-many that contextualizes the ambiguity of the individual in the whole. This does sound very much like Kant's categorical imperative, which Nishida loves to cite; the difference, however, is that Kant emphasizes the individual, Nishida the ambiguity in which the individual facing the world finds him/herself. It is this ambiguity, the demonic, that ultimately motivates Nishida to privilege the religious discourse over the ethical one—not because the ethical discourse is not necessary, but because true morality follows from the existential attitude of the "religious heart."

Ultimately, to use the language of Bennington, Nishida forsakes the ethical and even the moral for the archi-ethical. These differences are but a matter of discourse. The ethical in the sense of the discipline of ethics as a system of values and arguments is relegated to the realm of knowledge; morality in the sense of ethical intentions and actions to the realm of engagement; and the archi-ethical to the realm of religion. In this sense, Nishida's subversion of the traditional ethical systems leads to the discovery of the

archi-ethical that "survives deconstruction" and is not dependent on the metaphysical language of systematic ethics.

However, that does not mean that Nishida's non-dualism is not able to provide any guidelines for ethical reasoning; but he does change the discourse. In some sense, he rejects an ethics of judgment in favor of an ethics of understanding. His philosophy is descriptive rather than normative, even though, and he would be the first one to agree, those positions are not different in essence. In this system, the question is not one of locating blame or defining good or evil; rather the guiding principle is that of "expression" *(hyōgen)*. The significance of this principle can be summarized as follows: conceptually, Nishida starts with the assumption that the unity of universe and its plurality cannot be separated. In Nishida's terminology, the one absolute is manifested in the manifold of the phenomenal world. This means that there are no essential differences, and, subsequently, that the dichotomy of good and evil collapses. Practically speaking, no one individual is absolutely good or absolutely evil; rather, everyone expresses goodness and evil in some degree. However, even though Nishida's non-dualism denies that there are essential differences between good and evil, the principle of the one-and-yet-many does not justify crimes such as rape or genocide. To the contrary, it sets a high standard. Philosophical positions and moral activities that do not include the multiplicity of individuals fall short of human demand and require subversion and rethinking. The goal of philosophy and ethics is to embrace this all-inclusive attitude and to advance an ethics of, as Tanabe would say, transformation and "conversion" *(zange)*.

5 Conclusion

Like Bennington's Derrida, Nishida suggests a rethinking of ethics by first undermining its metaphysical ground. As Bennington correctly remarks, once ethics loses its fundament, ethics becomes the object of the same philosophical method that has put metaphysics in question. To Nishida, their dependence on a dualistic paradigm spells the downfall of traditional metaphysics and ethics alike. Like metaphysics, ethics has to be consequently rethought from a non-dualistic standpoint. This rethinking, however, puts into question the very separation of ethics and the other philosophical disciplines and, subsequently, constitutes nothing but an infusion of the ethics with the non-ethical. This method, which Bennington refers to as "the non-ethical opening of ethics" (Bennington, 2000, 35), constitutes a fundamental feature of a deconstructive reading of ethics. By the same token, Nishida asserts that an ethical theory must consider the self *vis-à-vis* the other and the world and the subject *vis-à-vis* the object.[17] Finally, Nishida's "absolute nothingness" *(zettai mu),* especially when read through the lens of the later Tanabe Hajime, exhibits remarkable similarities with Jacques Derrida's *différānce* in its philosophical function. While these terms, as it goes without saying, are framed in fundamentally different terms and discourses, they nevertheless function not only to conceptualize the infinite openness at the bottom of and at the very focal point of ethics, but also to reject the reducibility and the "absolutizability" of the moment of difference.

Notes

1 The research for this chapter would have not been possible without the generous support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Research, a two-year leave of absence I received from Luther College, the hospitality of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, and the invaluable feedback of Robert Maglolia and Youru Wang.

2 Nishida consistently argues that unity and disunity as well as purity and impurity and, by implication, the ethical and the non-ethical are not essentially different from each other (*NKZ* 1, 16; 15, 191).

3 See especially Nobechi Tōyō's *Nishida Tetsugaku Hihan* and Kume Yasuhiro's *Nishida tetsugaku: sono seiritsu and kansei*.

4 Itabashi Yūjin refers to Nishida's method as "pervasive criticism" *(tetteiteki hihyō shugi)* and Nishida's student and critic Tanabe Hajime argues that every non-dual paradigm should result into an "absolute critique" *(zettai hihan)* (Tanabe, 1963, 9, 46–63).

5 For an attempt to interpret Nishida's philosophy in the light of deconstruction see Nakamura's *Nishida Tetsugaku no datsukōchiku* and Nei Yasuyuki's *Gendai tetsugaku to jinbun kagaku*.

6 A pervasive, albeit disconcerting, feature of Nishida's work is his tendency to constantly rework the foundation of his own philosophical system until his death. While it is common to divide his development either, as Sueki Takehiro suggests, into three periods (the periods of "pure experience" [1911–23], "basho" [1924–32] and "self-identity of the absolute contradictories" [1933–45]) or, as Nishida implied in 1936, by means of five of his key phrases (Sueki, 1988, 1:6–9), I prefer to identify three phases in his work: (1) the idealist phase (1911–29); (2) an interim phase (1929–38) where he begins to think about and account for time, the other, and the historical world; and (3) his non-dual phase (1938–45).

7 This section is based on excerpts from my "The self-contradictory what?—Reflections on how to teach the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō" (2006).

8 According to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published by Iwanami Shoten in 1922, the term *katsudōsetsu* Nishida uses to identify his own position was borrowed from the Japanese translation of *Aktionstheorie,* which was developed by the German psychologist Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916) in the late nineteenth century.

9 Derrida reflects on this theme in his "of an apocalyptic tone newly adopted in philosophy."

10 In his *Inquiry into the Good,* Nishida suggests that philosophers conceived of reality traditionally as either naturalistic (*NKZ* 1, 82) or as spiritual (*NKZ* 1, 88).

11 In his article on Nishida in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* John Maraldo suggests that Nishida's overall project constitutes a "systematic deconstruction of logical relations" (Maraldo, 1998, 13).

12 A longer version of this famous Zen saying that I paraphrase here can be found in Abe's *Zen and Western Thought* (Abe, 1985, 4).

13 "Homeground" is Jan van Bragt's translation of "moto," the term used by Nishitani Keiji in his *Shūkyō ha nani ka (Religion and Nothingness).*

14 For other examples of Nishida's systematic subversion of continental philosophy see my "Between foundationalism and relativism: locating Nishida's logic of Basho on the Ideological Map," *The Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture,* vol. 27, 24–45.

15 Of course the argument can be and has been made that some of Nishida's writings, especially *Nihon bunka no mondai (The Problem of Japanese Culture)* (*NKZ* 12, 275–383), justify militarism and, subsequently, evil. However, the problem in Nishida's political writing is not that he does not condemn evil, but rather that he does not denounce nationalism and militarism as morally problematic.

16 For a treatment of Nishida's personal feelings about wartime Japan, I refer to Yusa Michiko's biography of Nishida Kitarō, *Zen and Philosophy* (2002).

17 In some sense, Nishida's "I and Thou" *(Watakushi to nanji)* is reminiscent of Martin Buber's "I and Thou" or even Emmanuel Levinas's conception of the "face of the other." For a more in-depth comparison between Nishida and these two thinkers see Heisig's "Non-I and Thou: Nishida, Buber, and the moral consequences of self-actualization" (2000); Tiziano Tosolini's "Infinity or nothingness? An encounter between Nishida Kitarō and Emmanuel Levinas" (2005); and my "Alterity and Nothingness: An exploration of Nishida's I and Thou" (1999).

Part II
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DERRIDEAN-LEVINASIAN AND ASIAN ETHICAL THOUGHT

8
ETHICS AND THE SUBVERSION OF CONCEPTUAL REIFICATION IN LEVINAS AND ŚĀNTIDEVA

William Edelglass

I

Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* employs a multiplicity of ethical strategies.[1] It contains elements comparable to virtue ethics, consequentialism, and stoicism. With Levinas, Śāntideva shares a concern for the moral dimension of the self-subversion of conceptual reification. My purpose in this chapter is to show that Levinas's ethics, in addition to traditional moral theories, can provide resources for sketching the contours of some Indian Buddhist texts, such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Because this project runs the risk of displacing Śāntideva's own thought, by way of introduction, I defend a limited use of Western moral categories in the interpretation of Indian Buddhist ethics.

Contemporary Western moral philosophers typically distinguish three kinds of theorizing about ethics: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Metaethics is constituted by an inquiry into the source, nature, and meaning of moral principles. Normative ethics, implicitly or explicitly grounded in metaethical accounts, distinguishes between morally appropriate and inappropriate action. Applying the results of metaethics and normative ethics to specific areas of moral concern, such as medicine, business, the environment, sexuality, poverty, or war, applied ethics recommends right behavior for particular situations or roles. Indian Buddhist traditions are rich in texts devoted to normative and applied ethics, but, for the most part, they lack philosophical reflection on the status, meaning, and origin of morality. While Indian Buddhists do make interesting moral distinctions, between natural and artificial precepts, for example, such distinctions are not subjects of philosophical reflection or debate. Instead of theorizing on moral concepts, then, most Indian Buddhist writings on ethics are descriptions, prescriptions, narratives, or meditations on virtuous behavior.

Faced with the absence of metaethical reflection, Western scholars interested in formal investigations of Indian Buddhist moral thinking construct their object of inquiry. Western philosophers working on Indian Buddhist analyses of language, perception, truth, or existence can compare their object of inquiry with Western theories because in these areas both traditions ask similar kinds of questions. Ethicists, however, do not have this option. Instead, ethicists analyze descriptions of precepts, perfections, narratives, or practices to disclose the moral reasoning which they believe justifies ethical theory and praxis in Indian Buddhist traditions. Description and analysis, then, results in the construction of a moral theory never explicitly articulated in Indian Buddhist texts.[2] Elucidating the moral reasoning implicitly justifying Buddhist ethics enables

interpretations that employ Western moral categories. Scholars pursuing this approach have most often regarded Buddhist morality as a form of eudaimonistic virtue ethics, but also, on occasion, as a type of consequentialism or deontology.

Analyzing Buddhist texts and practices with the help of Western moral theories is heuristically helpful, for it highlights general structures of Buddhist ethics. Moreover, without employing Western moral categories in the interpretation of Buddhist texts it would not be feasible to situate Buddhist moralities in the academic discussion of ethics. Nevertheless, the construction of a metaethical theory "implicit" in Buddhist traditions runs the risk of obscuring the very morality under investigation. This is especially true with projects that aim at providing the moral structure for a multiplicity of traditions, or even Buddhism in its entirety.[3] Against such projects, Charles Hallisey argues, "there can be no answer to a question that asks us to discover which family of ethical theory underlies Buddhist ethics in general, simply because Buddhists availed themselves of and argued over a variety of moral theories" (Hallisey, 1996, 37). Indeed, a single text, such as Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, often employs a plurality of moral theories, drawing on one or another depending on the particular context.

Śāntideva's ethics in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* initially appears to be a kind of virtue ethics. The text presents a path towards a particular *telos*, which Śāntideva believes to be the proper end of all sentient beings. The realization of this path is made possible through the cultivation of virtues, the six traditional perfections *(pāramitās)* of the bodhisattva. Śāntideva emphasizes the importance of cultivating proper habits over time, and argues that good action is intrinsically satisfying. Moreover, he insists, there are no rules that can cover all situations. Thus a prudent agent who is skillful *(kauśalya)* in strategy, method, or means *(upāya)*, if motivated by compassion, ought to perform those actions which are generally proscribed if they will diminish suffering in the world. Despite these resemblances to virtue ethics, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also possesses elements characteristic of consequentialism and stoic morality.

With utilitarians, Śāntideva is primarily committed to the alleviation of suffering. While Śāntideva does at times insist on the positive value of suffering, this positive value is inevitably justified through a calculation that will lead to an overall diminution of suffering.[4] Moreover, in calculating suffering, the suffering of the self does not take priority over the suffering of the other. However, Śāntideva differs from classical utilitarianism in rejecting the idea that, morally considered, motivation is insignificant compared to consequence. In this respect, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* resembles Stoic and Kantian frameworks in which the moral agent cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of consequences in the world. For Kant, everything in the world is governed by natural laws and thus the intention of an individual is not fully responsible for any particular result. Similarly, because Śāntideva is committed to the notion of dependent origination *(pratītyasamutpāda)*, he believes that every event has multiple conditions and no one causal power, such as an individual moral agent, can be fully responsible for an action in the world. For this reason, the perfections that constitute the bodhisattva path are located in the mind and cannot be evaluated on the basis of external consequences: "the perfection is the mental attitude itself" (Śāntideva, 1995, 34, V.10) and "since I cannot control external events, I will control my own mind" (*ibid.*, 35, V.14).[5]

Śāntideva's ethics cannot be reduced to any one of these three moral theories it resembles. Nevertheless, such comparative interpretations are fruitful, for they enable us

to recognize some contours of Śāntideva's ethics. My purpose in reading Śāntideva alongside Levinas is to emphasize the moral dimension of subverting even one's own conceptuality, thus indicating further contours of Indian Mahāyāna ethics.

Emmanuel Levinas is widely regarded as the most significant continental moral philosopher in the later half of the twentieth century. His influence is manifest not only in the revival of moral and religious thought in continental philosophy, but also in the development of a new discourse of the ethical dimension of alterity in literary studies, anthropology, religious studies, and other disciplines. What does Levinas offer the study of Indian Mahāy āna texts such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra?* At first glance, it would appear, very little. Levinas is informed by Jewish and twentieth-century continental traditions. The religious intellectual culture in which Śāntideva studied and practiced was scholastic, marked by the debates that dominated the later centuries of Indian Buddhist monastic education. Śāntideva and his interlocutors are informed by Indian epistemology, and accept, in one form or another, some formulation of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Thus they reject the monotheistic God and the substantial self, ideas which are radically altered by Levinas—who situates both God and the subject beyond being—but nevertheless play an important role in Levinas's writings. Perhaps most importantly, Mādhyamikas such as Śāntideva emphasize that ultimately there is no absolute distinction between self and other, or between other traditional binaries such as samsara and nirvana. Levinas would likely consider this emphasis on overcoming alterity to be a totalization, and thus violent appropriation of the singular, different, Other. Moreover, Levinas's commitment to the preservation of difference appears to be precisely the reification and absolutism that Śāntideva finds implicated in the mental defilements that cause suffering. Finally, for Levinas, ethical subjectivity is the traumatism of a responsibility too great to bear, a persecution, a violence to the self. For Śāntideva, ethical subjectivity is characterized by the sweetness and flourishing of liberation from mental defilements. Thus, it would be naïve, if not a totalizing act of interpretation, to insist that Levinas and Śāntideva are somehow making the same claims.

There are other differences between Śāntideva and Levinas, but also some significant resonances.[6] Both thinkers are committed to a radical, asymmetrical ethics in which the moral subject serves the other without seeking reciprocity. Their ethics are characterized by a generosity without recompense. In Levinas's language: "The word *I* means *here I am,* answering for everything and for everyone" (Levinas, 1974, 114). In Śāntideva's language: "As long as space abides and as long as the world abides, so long may I abide, destroying the sufferings of the world. Whatever suffering is in store for the world, may it all ripen in me" (Śāntideva, 1995, 143, X.55–6). At the heart of Levinas's ethics is a substitution for the other, an excessive responsibility for the other which elects the moral subject as a singular subjectivity. At the heart of Śāntideva's ethics is the exchange of self and other that liberates the self from self-cherishing, opening the mind to the suffering of others. And Levinas and Śāntideva both situate the locus of morality and ethical subjectivity in compassion. According to Levinas, compassion is the "supreme ethical principle" and the "nexus of subjectivity" (Levinas, 1991, 94). According to Śāntideva, compassion for the other is the deepest and truest desire of the self, liberating the self from a defensive, fortresslike subjectivity.

In this chapter I am interested in one specific resonance between Levinas and Śāntideva, namely their shared concern with the moral dimension of conceptual

reification. For Levinas, ethics, the welcoming of the Other, requires a self-subverting discourse which does not exclude or assimilate alterity. According to Śāntideva, ethics requires the deconstruction of objects we perceive and conceive. This deconstruction, Śāntideva argues, liberates us from the attachments which result both in our own suffering and disregard for the sufferings of others. Levinas, with his commitment to "unsay the said" of his own discourse, and Śāntideva, with his account of the lack of inherent existence of all things, including emptiness itself, argue that ethics requires deconstructing one's own discourse and conceptuality.

II

Emmanuel Levinas describes two kinds of alterity: the other *(autre)* that is constituted by consciousness, and the absolutely Other *(Autrui),* who signifies a meaning *(le sens)* outside intentional horizons. According to Levinas, I absorb what is other as food and drink, as the elements that sustain me, and that I transform through my work. The conversion through work and nourishment of what is other constitutes the satisfaction, enjoyment, and sustenance of the prelapsarian innocence of need, in which the self, anxious for its existence, nourishes itself. In contrast to the other *(autre),* the Other *(Autrui)* resists all attempts at assimilation or conceptualization. The difference between the self and the Other cannot be recognized against a common foundation of similarity, or ordered in a system at a higher genus; there is no third term that could introduce reciprocity or commensurability. Levinas argues that the sole meaning of the Other, the expression of the face, is the ethical command, the call of moral obligation. The face of the Other, signifying outside cultural context, is the source of ethics. And this ethical meaning, Levinas claims, is the horizon for all meanings. This is why Levinas insists that "ethics is first philosophy."

According to Levinas, the dominant traditions of Western philosophy have consistently obscured the absolutely Other. Despite the vigorous debates that indicate plurality and multiplicity within these traditions, Levinas argues, they share a belief that thought possesses a privileged access to alterity. Through rational methods and procedures, beings are gathered, encompassed, and assimilated, primarily as objects of knowledge. The relationship of knowledge constituted by a knowing subject and an objectified other strips the Other of its singularity. Subsumed under a category, the Other is absorbed into the projects and concerns of the self. This intellectualist project is motivated by the ideal of leaving nothing exterior to thought. The ideal of totality animates rationalism, empiricism, realism, and idealism; it is expressed most explicitly, perhaps, in Hegel's *Science of Logic: "truth is complete only in the unity of identity and difference"* (Hegel, 1812, 414). Levinas sees the appropriating, autonomous subject at work from the Parmenidean identity of thought and being, through the Socratic teaching of maieutics, the Cartesian *cogito,* Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, the Hegelian identity of Reason and the Real, Husserlian philosophy as egology, and Heideggerian *Dasein*.

In the autonomous philosophy of totality, Levinas claims, the Other person is displaced by a theme; even the interlocutor is replaced by an idea. Conceiving the Other as an object reducible to an abstract individual that functions as the bearer of a general

meaning in a system, Levinas argues, subsumes the ethical inviolability of the Other. For Levinas, the responsibility of the philosopher is to respond to the transcendent priority and singularity of the Other.

The Levinasian philosopher, however, appears caught in a dilemma. For, thinking the Other, writing the Other in a philosophical text, appears to treat the Other as a being in the world, and thus constitutes the very totalizing activity Levinas critiques. Jacques Derrida remarks on this tension between Levinas's philosophy and his language in "Violence and Metaphysics," where he claims, "Levinas *in fact* speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego—which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him—he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language" (Derrida, 1967, 125).

Levinas came to regard the ontological discourse of *Totality and Infinity* as a betrayal of the non-phenomenal rupture of Being (Levinas, 1963, 295; 1991, 197). In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), Levinas seeks to break free from the spell of ontological language. He sets out to describe and practice a language that maintains openness to alterity, that refrains from subsuming all meaning to ontology, that resolves the antagonism between the theory and practice of his previous texts. This resolution appears in Levinas's development of his earlier distinction between the said *(le Dit)*, and the saying *(le Dire)*. His practice of a non-subsuming discourse is seen in Levinas's self-subverting activity of "unsaying the said."

The said, according to Levinas, is the coherent, thematized discourse that conforms to the structures of grammar, logic, and narrative. The said is the totalized language that identifies meanings with clarity. The Other, however, always outside any possible horizon of systematic structures, ruptures the said with theoretical incoherence, indicating the saying beyond the said. The saying is not the communication of information or the expression of consciousness. According to Levinas, the saying is the very incommensurable presupposition of the said, a mark of the transcendence that overflows all possible grammars. Levinas describes the saying as an upsurge of communication, a hospitality, an exposure, a sincerity, a welcome of the Other. "Saying bears witness to the other of the Infinite which rends me, which in the saying awakens me" (Levinas, 1986, 74). Without apology, offering without reserve, without thematizing, the saying finds voice in the said, but leaves only a trace.

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas describes a reduction, not from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude, but from the said to the saying that is otherwise than being, beyond ontology. Like the phenomenological reduction, the Levinasian reduction does not unveil a wholly new realm or a supernatural reality. It does not indicate a mystical "somewhere else" that could be opposed to the said, or dialectically totalized. Instead, Levinas argues, the reduction indicates diachrony, the possibility of a language that is at once the saying and the said by which it is betrayed. This possibility is realized in the unsaying of the said, a discourse of openness and welcome that does not dominate the Other, a discourse Levinas finds in poetry and prophetic speech.

Conceptualizing the otherwise than being, the philosophical response to the Other, betrays the saying in the said. "In this betrayal," Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being*, "the indiscretion with regard to the unsayable, which is probably the very task of philosophy, becomes possible" (Levinas, 1974, 7). In articulating propositions and coherent arguments, Levinas claims, philosophy betrays the subject to whom it is

responding. Rupturing the coherent structure of theses and arguments, essence and totalities, unsays the said, and discloses the otherwise than being. The deconstructive act of self-subversion, in Levinasian ethics, is thus a moral response to the Other.

III

Instead of grasping and assimilating alterity to constitute identity, according to Levinas, ethical subjectivity is elected as singular through the call of moral responsibility. For Śāntideva, ethical subjectivity is similarly a reversal of the grasping of identity and objects that characterizes the consciousness of one who causes suffering to self and others. Ultimately, Śāntideva argues, this grasping is caused by a fundamental ignorance that ascribes substantial existence to the self and passing phenomena. "Seeing things the way they really are" *(yathābhūtadarśana),* according to Śāntideva, uproots grasping and the suffering it causes. Thus, the penultimate chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is devoted to the perfection of wisdom *(prajñāpāramitā),* and begins with the claim that everything which has preceded this chapter constitutes a preparation (Śāntideva, 1995, 115, IX.1). With the proper preparation of the cultivation of moral concern (the perfections of generosity, moral discipline, patience, and vigor) and mental tranquility (the perfection of mental absorption), Śāntideva argues, meditation on Madhyamaka wisdom neutralizes ignorance and attachment.

The most significant doctrine of Madhyamaka wisdom, according to Śāntideva, is the lack of inherent existence *(svabhāva)* of all phenomena. Śāntideva's emphasis on emptiness as the central insight of Buddhist philosophy is derived from Nāgārjuna, who is credited with founding the Madhyamaka School.[7] According to Nāgārjuna, "For him to whom emptiness is clear, everything becomes clear. For him to whom emptiness is not clear, nothing becomes clear" (Nāgārjuna, 1995, 69, XXIV. 14). "Empty" *(śūnya)* and "emptiness" *(śūnyatā)* were important terms in pre-Mahāyāna Abhidharma philosophy. According to the Abhidharma literature, the phenomena that constitute human beings, trees, and other sensible objects are indeed empty of self; they are conceptually constructed. But these gross objects that populate our world of sensation are constituted by ultimate constituents that exist inherently. For, Ābhidharmikas asked, how else could the gross phenomena appear?[8] Nāgārjuna's thought is an extension of the Abhidharma analysis of phenomena, for he claims that not only sensible objects, but *all* their constituent parts as well, are empty of intrinsic being. Previous Buddhist philosophers had agreed that all phenomena and their ultimate constituents arise based on causes and conditions. Nāgārjuna, however, argues for the identity of dependent origination *(pratītyasamutpāda)* and emptiness of inherent existence. Thus, according to Nāgārjuna, in addition to sensible phenomena, their constituent parts and even the primary phenomena of Buddhist philosophy and practice, including suffering, the Four Noble Truths, samsara, nirvana, and the Buddha, are all empty of inherent existence.

Śāntideva maintains Nāgārjuna's radical commitment to emptiness. But what is emptiness for Śāntideva? And when an object is said to be empty, what, exactly, is it lacking? According to Śāntideva, emptiness refers to the non-substantiality *(niḥsvabhāvatā)* that is ultimately left upon complete, critical analysis of an object.[9] Indian logicians generally distinguish between negation which in its negating affirms the

existence of something else *(paryudāsa),* and negation that carries with it no positive implication and thus leaves only absence *(prasajya).* According to Mādhyamikas such as Śāntideva, the former is only a "relative" negation, and leads to one of two extreme ontological positions: either existence is negated, and nihilism is affirmed, or, nihilism is negated and absolutism, or eternalism, is affirmed. But Madhyamaka negation is an absolute negation, a thoroughgoing application of emptiness as a method to liberate the practitioner from reifying concepts. Thus there is no affirmation, either of existence or non-existence, or of any propositions (pratijñās) or views *(dṛṣṭis).*

Śāntideva is not claiming that the objects we experience do not exist in any way. Rather, they do not possess "inherent existence" *(svabhāvasiddhi).* The fundamental conceptual error we make is to impute inherent existence to the object when it is empty of inherent existence. Thus Śāntideva's account of wisdom is oriented towards an awareness of the mind's tendency to latch on to objects that are merely conceptual constructs *(prajñāptimātra).* Objects do exist, but precisely as mentally imputed dependent designations *(prajñaptir upādāya).* Emptiness, then, is not non-existence. Nor does emptiness refer to some mysterious transcendent reality, Kantian noumenon, or Heideggerian Being, as some Western scholars have believed. Indeed, Śāntideva would reject Levinas's insistence on an irreducible alterity that resists all analysis. For Śāntideva, emptiness is simply the lack of inherent existence of mental and physical phenomena.

Emptiness is always the emptiness *(śūnyatā)* or absence *(abhāva)* of a particular object, a reified, conceptually constructed phenomenon. Thus emptiness itself is dependent on the condition of the object to be analyzed, and is itself empty of inherent existence *(śūnyatāśūnyatā).* "When there is no perception of something falsely projected as existent, there is no understanding of the non-existence of that entity. For it follows that, if an entity is not real, the negation of it is clearly not real" (Śāntideva, 1995, 129, IX.139).[10] For this reason, Śāntideva insists, there is no infinite regress of analyses of emptiness: "When the thing which is to be analyzed has been analyzed there is no basis left for analysis. Since there is no basis it does not continue and that is said to be Enlightenment" (*ibid.,* 126, IX. 110).

Śāntideva's Cittamātrin interlocutor wonders how insight into the emptiness of phenomena leads to liberation (*ibid.,* 118, IX. 30). Conceptual reification, because it causes passionate attachment and the defilements which destabilize our minds, is, Śāntideva argues, the deepest source of our suffering. Because we mistakenly ascribe inherent existence to our own selves, we are overcome with self-cherishing. Because we mistakenly ascribe inherent existence to objects, we are overcome by attachment or repulsion. According to Śāntideva, wisdom recognizes that any object can be deconstructed until one is left with the emptiness of emptiness. Even conceptual and verbal expressions of emptiness run the risk of reification, for we could be tempted to regard emptiness itself as an inherently existing characteristic of phenomena. Thus wisdom is manifest in the self-subversion of one's own words, perceptions, and concepts. For Śāntideva, only this kind of self-subversion neutralizes the cognitive and affective defilements that result in suffering for the self and insensibility to the suffering of others. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* the deconstructive self-subversion of conceptual reification makes possible the compassionate response to the suffering other.

IV

My use of the term "deconstructive" in this chapter is not meant to characterize Śāntideva and Levinas as engaged in a common "deconstructive" project. More broadly, I am not interested in arguing that Śāntideva and other Mādhyamikas anticipate deconstructive or postmodern theory. Śāntideva's accounts of dependent origination or the emptiness of emptiness do not imply, prefigure, or mean "the same thing" as Derrida's "undecidability." Śāntideva's presentation of the two truths *(satyadvaya)* defends the legitimacy of conventional truth. For, according to Śāntideva, the distinction is not between truth and falsehood, but between two *truths (satya)*. Thus, within the conventional truth, Śāntideva maintains a distinction between what is conventionally true *(tathya saṃvṛti)* and what is conventionally false *(mithyā saṃvṛti)*. The former would include the truths of natural science and mathematics, as well as the social sciences, and all the propositions that are affirmed through shared linguistic practices. Derridean deconstruction contests claims at the conventional level and, according to Śāntideva's framework, remains at the conventional level. I utilize the term "deconstructive" because, to use another Derridean term, it has been disseminated so widely that it can now refer to the kind of self-subverting strategies employed by Śāntideva and other Mādhyamikas without being limited to Derrida's methodology.

Similarly, I have not argued that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a form of Levinasian ethics, or that Levinas and Śāntideva have the same ethics. Too often, comparative philosophers have exaggerated similarity and neglected difference (Larson, 1988). The broad contours of Śāntideva's thought constitute a contrast as much as, if not more than, a resemblance to Levinas's work. My purpose in this chapter has been to thematize a Levinasian strategy in Śāntideva's ethics, a shared concern for the moral significance of deconstructing one's own concepts. Interpreting the multiplicity of ethical strategies and forms in Indian Buddhist moral thought demands a theoretically pluralistic approach that draws on a variety of Western moral categories. Restricting the interpretation of Indian Buddhist ethics to one particular Western moral category obscures the diversity between and within texts. And restricting the study of Indian Buddhist ethics to Western categories more generally diminishes the possibilities of describing what is singular and unique in Indian Buddhist ethics. But excluding Western moral categories from the study of Indian Buddhism effectively excludes Indian Buddhist ethics from contemporary academic ethics. Levinas's work, then, provides only some of the many resources that can help Western scholars in the study of the ethics of a Madhyamaka text, such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Notes

1 I am grateful to Eric Nelson for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

2 For a defense of this strategy and how it can provide the moral reasoning that justifies Buddhist ethics, see Keown, 1992.

3 See, for example, Keown, 1992, which is an attempt to provide a moral theory for all Buddhist traditions.

4 Keown argues that based on purely formal reasons, Buddhist ethics cannot be utilitarian. What is right is defined according to the maximization of the good, which is characterized independently of the right. In Buddhism, Keown claims, the right and the good are

inseparable: "*Nirvāṇa* is the good, and rightness is predicated of acts and intentions to the extent which they participate in nirvanic goodness" (Keown, 1992, 177). While Keown's claim for Buddhist ethics in general is debatable, Śāntideva's ethics is not primarily oriented towards nirvana. Rather, for Śāntideva, the alleviation of suffering is the highest good. Bodhicitta is significant because it is the primary means for the liberation of suffering, both for the self and the other.

5 Quotations from Śāntideva, 1995 and Nāgārjuna, 1995 include the page number, followed by a reference to the specific chapter and verse.

6 For a careful and nuanced discussion of differences and resonances between Levinas and some Buddhist thinkers, see Pitkin, 2001.

7 Mādhyamikas, following Nāgārjuna, present their teachings as a mean *(madhyama),* a middle path *(madhyamamārga),* a moderate course of action *(madhyamā pratipad),* between any set of extremes, but most famously between nihilism and essentialism. The term "Madhyamaka" arose some centuries after Nāgārjuna in response to the development of the Cittamātra. Nāgārjuna himself employed the term *śūnyatāvādin* to describe his own position.

8 For a contemporary defense of this position see Burton, 1999, especially pp. 87–121.

9 Tibetan Mādhyamikas developed a number of technical terms to describe exactly what was absent in emptiness, including "true existence," "ultimate existence," "existence by means of an own-characteristic," "existence from its own side," "truly established existence," etc. (Hopkins, 1983, 36).

10 This verse became the *locus classicus* of Tibetan discussions of the relation between emptiness and the negated object (Williams, 1998, 65).

9
LEVINAS AND LAOZI ON THE DECONSTRUCTION OF ETHICS

A.T.Nuyen

The aim of this chapter is to argue that we can understand the *Daodejing* better if we understand it as a deconstruction of ethics similar to Levinas's attempt to pull the metaphysical rug of Being from underneath ethics. The idea that Daoist philosophy is deconstructive is not new. Indeed, many commentators have argued that it bears comparison with Derrida's deconstruction in the main aspects of both (Yeh, 1983; Cheng, 1990; Chien, 1990; Ownes, 1993; Nuyen, 1995). However, these efforts tend to focus on the metaphysical issues, hence on Chuangzi, leaving the ethics of Daoism, and the ethics of the *Daodejing* in particular, unexplored. I shall argue in this chapter that the "deconstructive way," as one commentator has put it (Yeh, 1983), is seen most clearly if we focus on the ethical issues. With this in mind, it is more productive to read the *Daodejing* through the lens of Levinas rather than Derrida. It is not my intention to make a direct comparison of Levinas and Laozi, reading one as the other, nor to show that Levinas's philosophy can be construed as Daoist, nor that Daoist philosophy is Levinasian. There are sufficient profound dissimilarities between Levinas and Laozi, and between Levinas's ethics and the ethics of the *Daodejing,* to discourage such efforts. Rather, I aim to show that in both Levinas and Laozi, there is an ethics that is deconstructive, or more precisely, that both speak of ethics deconstructively. In Section I, I shall explain what it means to "speak of ethics deconstructively." In Section II, I shall show how both Levinas and Laozi do so. Specifically, I want to show that, in the *Daodejing, de* stands to *dao* as Levinas's ethic of responsibility stands to the otherwise of Being, to the *saying* from beyond essence.

I

Deconstruction is many things to many people. To one commentator, at one extreme, it is an "oxymoronic blend of prolixity, turgidity, and lightness …," it has "uncouth density" and consists of "sterile stratagems" (Verges, 1992, 386, 390). To some literary critics, who stand at one other extreme, it is a way of reading texts that is imaginative, innovative, and liberating, a way of reading that is not dictated by the presumption of a true, or correct, meaning that each text must have. To the former, deconstruction is not just destruction but total annihilation, annihilation of meaning, truth, value, and so of ethics as well. If such critics were right, a deconstructive ethics, Levinasian or otherwise, would indeed be oxymoronic. I have elsewhere (Nuyen, 1993) argued against this extreme view of deconstruction, and I will simply assume here that it is mistaken. I shall

also ignore the views of deconstructionist literary critics, as they are not particularly relevant to the task at hand. What, then, is deconstruction?

I shall use the term "deconstruction" to refer to a group of interrelated ideas made well known by Derrida. On the negative side is Derrida's rejection of the idea that the meaning of a term is dictated by the one who utters it, and that of a text by the one who authors it, an idea that led Plato to privilege speech over writing, a tendency that Derrida calls "phonocentrism." Generalizing from this, Derrida claims that traditional philosophy is structuralist in nature, in that it always presupposes a structure that requires to be present in its center something—God, rationality, substance, ideology, etc.—that guarantees meaning, truth, and value. Derrida refers to this idea as the "metaphysics of presence." From the philosophical point of view, it is rationality that is typically present in the center of a philosophical structure, a view that Derrida calls "logocentrism." A concerted attack on the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism can be found in Derrida's earlier works, particularly *Speech and Phenomena* (Derrida, 1973), *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1976) and *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978a). But this attack cannot be taken in isolation from other key, positive, ideas in Derrida's deconstructive package. Indeed, taken in isolation, it has resulted in a version of deconstruction derided by Derrida's detractors and uncritically embraced by many of his followers. One such key idea is *différance*. What is often not noticed by Derrida's detractors and uncritical followers is that Derrida accepts that there are such things as meanings, truth, and values. What makes Derrida different from traditional philosophers is that he takes a deconstructive view of meanings, truth, and values, taking them to be the outcomes of *différance*.

What, then, is *différance*? It is a neologism constructed by Derrida from the ordinary French word *différence*. It is not an easy thing to explain what it is, and to make matters worse, Derrida insists that *différance* "is neither a *word* not a *concept*" (Derrida, 1973, 130). The idea of *différance*—"neither a word nor a concept" but at least an idea—is inspired by the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, the meaning of a word (e.g. "dog") is not determined by any extra-linguistic entity (e.g. the animal dog) but by the differences between that word and other words close to it in terms of the sound images (e.g. the sounds of "fog," "log", etc.) and in terms of the mental images signified by them (e.g. the mental images of a cat, a wolf, a fox, etc.). Indeed, Derrida borrows from Saussure the words "signifier" and "signified" (used by Saussure to refer respectively to the sound image and the mental image of a word). In Derrida's hands, the "signifiers" are the words themselves and the "signifieds" are the extra-linguistic entities whose presence (or presence in the intention of the speaker) is supposed for the determination of meanings (together with the metaphysical presence of the speaker). Inspired by Saussure, Derrida insists that meanings are determined by the signifiers themselves, by the words of the text: "There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1976, 158). They are determined by the "play of differences" in the words themselves, in the way they signify, and in the way we use them for our own purposes, whatever they may be. The play of differences, in turn, is made possible by the fact that part of the meaning of a word is the very thing, or things, that the word excludes, for example, the "day" that "night" excludes, the "oak tree" that the "acorn" excludes. Very often, what is excluded is merely deferred, like the day that is deferred from what now is the night, the oak tree that is deferred from the present acorn. "*Différance*" is meant,

partly, to capture the idea that there are both differing and deferring in language. It is the differings and deferrings of language that produce meanings, truths and values: *différance* "could be said to designate the productive and primordial constituting causality, the process of scission and division whose differings and differences would be the constituted products or effects" (Derrida, 1973, 137). What is deferred, or excluded, can be called upon to undermine the unity of meaning, to blur the sharp line that divides the two terms of a binary opposition, thus leading to a multiplicity of meanings. For many literary critics, this constitutes deconstructive reading.

However, this is not all there is to deconstruction. It is important to stress at this point—and this is something that commentators often overlook—that "there is nothing outside the text" only as far as meanings are concesrned. This notorious statement is neither an endorsement of anti-realism nor a confirmation of idealism. Indeed, Derrida insists that a text, or language generally, must have an "other" outside of it:

> I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is in fact saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the "other," and the "other of language."
>
> (Kearney, 1984, 123)

More importantly, this "other" leaves a "trace" within the text, inhabiting in the in-between of words and concepts, and of the binary oppositions of words and concepts. It is an absent remainder of, or an "undecidable" within, language. It is as silent as the ending *"-ance"* in *différance*. As such, it often plays a subversive function, disrupting the signification process and undermining the authority of the speaker. This "other" can only be hinted at in language. Yet, precisely because it can be hinted at, the hinting itself can serve to disrupt the semantic, the declarative, and the axiomatic functions of language, in just the same way as does the "deferred," the textual "other," as we saw above. This "metaphysical other" can also serve to *deconstruct* claims of meanings, truth, and values.

The deconstruction of claims of meanings and truth has been widely practiced and is thus quite well known, but that of values, particularly ethical values, is less so. Yet it is precisely traditional ethical theories that are ripe for deconstruction. Like the rest of traditional philosophy, traditional ethical theories are constructed each as a structure with a center, in which resides a value-dispensing entity, such as a God in Christian ethics, a rational being in Kantian ethics, an ideal observer in consequentialism, and so on. To use another metaphor, a traditional ethical theory is typically constructed on a foundation. For Cartesians, the roots of any ethical foundation will have to go all the way down to the first philosophy that bears the name of the thinking being, the *res cogitans*. To be sure, the entity at the center, or the center of the foundation, of a traditional moral theory—God, the noumenal self, the ideal observer—is typically characterized as an "other" to the moral agent. But this "other" is quite unlike the Derridean "other." This "other" is not a "trace" that is undecidable, that inhabits the in-between, that "remains undecided between the active and the passive [and] recalling something like a middle voice" (Derrida, 1982, 9). Instead, this "other" is typically fully conceptualized, fully articulated either as an active or a passive, even when it is characterized as the Infinite, or the Transcendental, or the Ideal. As we shall see, what both Laozi and Levinas have done is on the one hand to

reject the idea that we can conceptualize, or characterize, or speak of, or name, the "other," and on the other hand to show that this non-conceptualizable, this unnamable "other" disrupts and undermines our ethical theorizing. To do this is precisely to deconstruct, in the Derridean sense, the ethical claims of traditional theories. This is the sense in which Laozi and Levinas are said to speak deconstructively of ethics.

More particularly, I am suggesting that both Laozi and Levinas gesture at an other that deconstructs ethical claims and judgments made on the basis of ethical principles, or moral laws, posited in traditional moral theories. Before elaborating on this claim, it is important to stress that I am not suggesting that there is no difference between Derrida's talk of the other and Levinas's. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to compare and contrast Derrida's other with Levinas's. Suffice it to point out that (1) Derrida draws some differences between himself and Levinas on the notion of the other (Derrida, 1978a) and (2) Levinas has a more complex notion of the other, speaking of, as we shall see, both the other *(l'autre)* and the Other *(l'Autrui).* My purpose in invoking Derrida here is to explain the sense of "speaking deconstructively." To repeat, I use this phrase to refer to the strategy of invoking some undecidable element that is both outside a particular structure of thought and apt to disrupt this structure. I will call any element that plays this deconstructive role a "Derridean other" without suggesting that it *is* Derrida's other (hence "Derridean" rather than "Derrida's"). Thus, insofar as Levinas, or Laozi, speaks of an element that plays a deconstructive role, Levinas, or Laozi, speaks of a Derridean other. For my purpose, the similarity between Derrida and Levinas does not go beyond the deconstructive force of something outside the text, something otherwise than being. Thus there is no suggestion that since Levinas deconstructs traditional ethical theories and makes his ethics of responsibility "first philosophy," Derrida must likewise be said to have in mind some kind of ethics as first philosophy, even though there is certainly an ethical side to his deconstruction.

Returning to my claim above, there is ample textual evidence to support it. In the case of Laozi, the evidence lies in the very first two lines of the *Daodejing:* "The [D]ao that can be told of is not the eternal [D]ao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name" (Chan, 1963, 139). With these two lines, the *Daodejing* begins with a paradox: It discusses that which cannot be told of and named. We can, of course, interpret the first two lines in such a way as to dissolve the paradox. We can, for instance, read them as saying that the *dao* is a negativity, a non-being, as opposed to the positive being that originates from it, and as such the *dao* cannot be told of, or named, in the way that anything with a positive being can be told of or named. Read this way, the *dao* does not "remain(s) undecided between the active and the passive," to use Derrida's words cited above. It is not a Derridean "other." I have elsewhere argued that this reading is mistaken (Nuyen, 1995). The main point of my claim is that reading the first two lines of the *Daodejing* this way is to miss the fundamental point that the *dao* is truly *unnamable,* not even as the "nameless," which is a name. The *dao* of Laozi is not the negative non-being in the simple sense of the opposite of the positive being. In various chapters of the *Daodejing* (e.g. chs. 25 and 42), we are told that the *dao* is beyond and prior to the positive *yang* and the negative *yin,* before heaven and earth, truly "undecided between the active and the passive." Yet the *dao* speaks, albeit with an indeterminable "middle voice" (to use another Derridean phrase). As I shall argue, it speaks through the *de,* making *de* not just a virtuous way but also a power, or a potency, to disrupt and to undermine our

traditional ways of seeing our ethical relationships with others. This is the sense in which Laozi speaks deconstructively of ethics. This is the sense in which the ethical message in the *Daodejing* is a deconstructive one. I shall look more closely at that message in Section II.

Turning now to Levinas, textual evidence that justifies my reading is not hard to find. It can be seen even in the title of one of Levinas's books: *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. This title speaks of an "other" that is other than the active and the passive, other than Being and hence also non-Being, "other otherwise," as Levinas puts it. For Levinas, this "other," *l'autre*, is that which makes the person that I encounter a truly Other, *l'Autrui*, beyond my thematization and conceptualization, a being that is "absolutely foreign to me—refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every characterology, to every classification" (Levinas, 1969, 73). By contrast, traditional ethical theories treat the Other as a being like me, possessing rationality and deserving respect, and where necessary deserving to be a recipient of my benevolence. Thus, in traditional ethical theories, the Other is essentially the Same: You and I are the same in being both moral agents. For Levinas, the Other *"is not under a category"* (*ibid.*, 69, emphasis original) by virtue of a Derridean "other" that is "other otherwise." As we shall see, because of this Derridean "other," my commerce with the Other can only be ethical. This Derridean "other" deconstructs the foundation of traditional ethical theories, putting ethics itself first before all else, thus making it "first philosophy." This is the sense in which Levinas speaks deconstructively of ethics. If I am right, we are justified in reading Laozi through Levinas, as I propose to do in Section II.

II

In various works, Levinas argues that it is the radical otherness of those with whom I interact—biblically referred to by Levinas as the stranger, the homeless, the neighbor, the widow, the orphan, or generally as the Other *(l'Autrui)*—that disrupts and undermines, or deconstructs, as Derrida would put it, my understanding of myself as a being having a particular essence, which is binarily opposed to something else having some other essence—a man as opposed to a woman, a husband as opposed to a bachelor, a professional as opposed to a manual worker, and so on. We feel this deconstructive effect in the very phenomenology of subjectivity. Thus I encounter myself as a subject when and only when I am aware of myself as a unique identity, completely separated from what is not myself, and this awareness comes to me only when I am aware of others as completely other. As Levinas puts it in *Otherwise than Being*, subjectivity is constituted as a "node and denouement" of being and the otherwise than being, "of essence and the essence's other" (Levinas, 1981, 10). Clearly, then, Levinas is here speaking of an other that inhabits the in-between of being and the otherwise of being, between essence and the beyond of essence, an other that deconstructs being. Subjectivity results from such deconstruction.

Levinas goes on to argue that each of us has a desire for subjectivity, a primordial desire designated by Levinas simply as "Desire," which expresses itself every time we utter "I." Given that subjectivity can only be confirmed by the separation of the "I" from the "not-I" as mentioned above, the desire for subjectivity can only be fulfilled when the

"I" maintains the separation between it and the Other, and it can do so by maintaining the radical alterity of the Other, maintaining the Other's otherness. The trouble is that the "I" exists in the world as a being and has the tendency to totalize others, absorbing them into its being, its essence. This tendency has to be resisted, or deconstructed. To maintain the Other in its radical alterity, I must avoid making myself the standard of reference in my dealings with them, avoid calculating everything in terms of my interests, my enjoyment, and my welfare. As Levinas puts it, I have to behave in such a way that "the good of this world break forth from the exclusive property of enjoyment," or from the "egoist and solitary enjoyment" (Levinas, 1969:76). The enjoyment in which "I am absolutely for myself" (*ibid.,* 134) "assuredly does not render the concrete man" (*ibid.,* 139). This breaking away from "egoist and solitary enjoyment" is what makes my commerce with the Other ethical. Ethics, then, deconstructs the being of the "I" and reveals to it its subjectivity. Fortunately, in my day-to-day commerce with my fellow beings, which is typically conducted in language, I already realize that they possess an alterity that cannot be absorbed into the totality of my being. As Levinas puts it, the "relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the revelation of the other to me" (*ibid.,* 73). In my day-to-day commerce, I already realize that the Other possesses a radical alterity, an absolute otherness that can confirm my subjectivity. All I have to do is to make this commerce ethical.

How am I to make my commerce with the Other ethical? Levinas's answer is that I have to be responsible for the Other. It is this "responsibility [that] confirms the subjectivity" of the "I" (Levinas, 1969, 245). Levinas goes on: "To utter 'I,' to affirm the irreducible singularity [of my subjectivity]…means to possess a privileged place with regard to responsibilities for which no one can replace me and from which no one can release me. To be unable to shirk: this is the I" *(ibid.).* The responsibility for the Other that defines subjectivity is not one that the "I" chooses to take on in an ethical decision. It is a primordial responsibility that produces the "I" in the first place and thus is prior to freedom. It possesses an "antecedence to my freedom,…to the present and to representation, is a passivity more passive than all passivity, an exposure to the other without this exposure being assumed" (Levinas, 1981, 15). How am I to be responsible for the Other? By exposing myself "to outrage, to wounding" *(ibid.),* by taking on the burdens of others as a "hostage who substitutes himself for the others" *(ibid.),* by offering others "even the bread out of one's own mouth and the coat from one's shoulders" (*ibid.,* 55).

We have seen how ethics arises, for Levinas, in the process of deconstruction of the being of the "I," of its essence. We have seen that the deconstructive force comes from the radical otherness of the Other, which serves precisely the deconstructive function of the Derridean "other." We have seen that the metaphysical "Desire" for subjectivity is fulfilled when we turn toward this "other" in our maintenance of the radical alterity of the Other. While this alterity, this otherness, cannot be named or told of in our thematization and conceptualization, we do come face to face with it in our ethical commerce with the Other. The deconstruction of the totality of being is the endless reaching out for this "other." Thus Levinas effectively confirms Derrida's statement cited earlier, namely: "The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other,' and the 'other of language'." Indeed, what Derrida means by "language" here is arguably what Levinas calls "the *said*" and what he means by "the other of language" is arguably what Levinas

calls "the *saying*." In traditional ethical theories, the subject, the "I," first arises, as for example in a Cartesian *cogito,* full of being and possessive of an essence that is its identity, and subsequently arrives at ethical principles and makes ethical choices, guided by the *logos* that is part of its essence. This traditional "I" *says* what is ethical and what is not, and its ethics is part of the *said*. In deconstructing this traditional "I," its logocentrism, in rejecting the *said* of traditional ethics, Levinas shows how an "I" emerges in its ethical commerce with the Other. He shows that ethics is not part of the *said,* based on a foundation that is also part of the *said*. Rather, ethics is the reaching out for the other of the *said,* the reaching out for the *saying*. In his religious writings, or in the religious moments of his writings on ethics, Levinas equates this with the reaching out for God, the true God that is beyond what is thematized and conceptualized in the *said* of traditional theology, the God that "comes to mind" in His *saying*. The metaphysical Desire for subjectivity translates into the Desire for the Infinite, for God, a "metaphysical desire [that] tends toward *something else entirely,* toward the *absolutely other*" (Levinas, 1969, 33, emphasis original). To be ethical and to be religious are one and the same thing.

Just as Levinas's God cannot be conceptualized and thematized, Laozi's *dao* cannot be named and spoken of. That which can be named and spoken of is not the real, or the constant, or the eternal *dao*. The first two lines of the *Daodejing* suggest that we may profit from reading it through Levinas. The fact that Levinas links ethics to the Infinite adds strength to this notion given the juxtaposition of *dao* and *de* in the very title of Laozi's work. In particular, it can be argued that, like Levinas, Laozi speaks deconstructively of ethics. As we have seen, this means deconstructing traditional ethical teachings, particularly those that name and speak of the *dao* as some principle that can be incorporated into a foundation of an ethical discourse. Just as Levinas urges an ethics not explicable in the words of the *said* but, precisely for that reason, one that allows us to remain within the proximity of the *saying* of the other, of the Infinite, of God, Laozi urges that we follow "the teaching that uses no words" *(bu yan zhi jiao)* (*Daodejing,* ch. II; Lau, 1963, 58), the *de* that allows us to remain in proximity of the *dao*. It is through the teaching of this *de* that we can comport ourselves according to the *dao,* and we need to comport ourselves with it because the *dao* is the very ground of our existence, being "the beginning of heaven and earth" and "the mother of the myriad creatures" (*Daodejing,* ch. I; Lau, 1963, 57).

With Levinas in mind, the second line of *Daodejing* ("always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe [the *dao's*] manifestations" [ch. I; Lau, 1963, 57]) can be given a Levinasian reading as a claim for the need to develop a metaphysical desire for the *dao* that parallels the metaphysical desire for the Infinite in Levinas. The first line ("rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets") then becomes the equivalent of the Levinasian thesis that the desires for the enjoyment that is "absolutely for myself" have to be rid of because they will only entrench me within the totality of my being, within the worldly affairs, and thus will effectively turn me away from the Infinite, from the secrets of the *dao*. Traditional ethical theories, the teachings that use words, as Laozi would say, may succeed in making the enjoyment that is absolutely for myself conform to certain ethical principles, but the pursuit of it is still absolutely for myself, even if the "myself" is seen as some ethical self. To follow the teachings that use words, one needs to make choices of certain actions over others, and perform them so as to conform to their ethical principles. But in doing this, the "manifestations" of the *dao* will be missed and its

"secrets" will remain secret. Instead, what we are to do is to follow "the teaching that uses no words," that is, to accept being virtuous as a primordial responsibility that arises prior to freedom, prior to choices, and prior to actions that manifest those choices. This, I take it, is the Levinasian take on the idea of "Taking no action" *(wuwei)* that is a recurrent theme in the *Daodejing*. *Wuwei* is thus a "passivity more passive than all passivity," as Levinas says about ethical responsibility. The teaching that uses no words, Laozi's *de,* is a teaching of a primordial responsibility for my fellow human beings that falls on me without my choosing. *De* is not founded on anything *said* and yet allows us to hear the *saying* of the *dao,* to observe its manifestations. Furthermore, *de* carries with it the deconstructive power of the *dao,* and to follow *de* is to deconstruct the entity that is constructed in the midst of worldly affairs, full of being and pregnant with essence. The "nothing" of the *dao* that is at the heart of *de* deconstructs this entity to produce a "something," namely an ethical "I," a virtuous individual. In this something, the nothingness of the *dao* manifests itself. Thus, we are told that "Something and Nothing produce each other" (*Daodejing,* ch. II; Lau, 1963, 58).

I have suggested that the "Something" that is produced by the "Nothing" is a virtuous being who follows the teaching that uses no words. But how does the virtuous "Something" in turn produce the "Nothing"? The answer lies in Levinas's account of ethical conduct as an opening up to the Other in such a way as to maintain their radical alterity, their otherness. To be ethical, as we have seen, is the same thing as to be religious in the sense of tending "toward *something else entirely,* toward the *absolutely other*." For Laozi, the "absolutely other" is the "Nothing" that is unnameable, a "mystery upon mystery" (*Daodejing,* ch. I; Lau, 1963, 57). By contrast, to be "absolutely for myself" is to be trapped in the totality of one's being, to remove oneself from the "node and denouement" of being and the otherwise than being where one's subjectivity is located. Indeed, one is still trapped even if one follows the teachings of traditional ethical theories, the teachings that use words, insofar as such teachings spin out of being and totalize all else. So trapped, both "Something"—the "I" in its full subjectivity—and "Nothing"—the "absolutely other" that is a "mystery upon mystery"—are snuffed out. To be responsible for others, to accomplish *de,* is to break out from the totality of one's being, thus allowing the "Something" to be realized, together with the "Nothing." For Levinas, acting ethically toward others is not self-effacing but the exact opposite, namely self-confirming. In a similar way, we find Laozi arguing that "the sage puts his person last and it comes out first," that he treats his person "as extraneous to himself and it is preserved" (*Daodejing,* ch. VII; Lau, 1963, 63). Being ethical, or virtuous, the sage puts his person last in his commerce with his fellow human beings, going out of himself as if his person is extraneous to himself in the service of others. Yet, in doing so, he confirms his subjectivity as a "Something," preserving his person. Being selfless, "without thought of self *(wusi),*" he manages "to accomplish his private ends *(si)*" of confirming his own subjectivity, of satisfying the metaphysical desire for the absolutely other, for knowledge of the secrets of the *dao*. We are now in a position to see why in "bestow(ing) all he has on others" and "giv(ing) all he has to others," "he has yet more," and having given all, "he is richer still" (*Daodejing,* ch. LXXXI; Lau, 1963, 143). For Levinas, in "giving the bread out of one's mouth and the coat from one's shoulders," what one gains is one's own subjectivity. To have this is to have more than egoist enjoyment, to be richer than one without subjectivity.

It may be objected at this point that the virtuous sage in Laozi is nothing like the ethical person in Levinas. Thus it may be said that while the latter immerses himself or herself in feeding the hungry and comforting the distressed, the former is counseled not to “contend” *(zheng)* with “the myriad creatures” (*Daodejing,* ch. VIII; Lau, 1963, 64). There are two possible ways of cashing out this objection. One is to say that while Levinas’s ethics is humanistic, Laozi’s is not. The second way is to say that for Levinas, the ethical person seeks to benefit others by acting, whereas for Laozi, he or she is counseled to benefit others by taking no action. It may be said further that the difference between Levinas and Laozi rests on a more fundamental difference between them on the idea of the other. My response to these two points consists in admitting the second without conceding the first. Levinas and Laozi do indeed differ on the notion of the other (no less than both, each in his own way, differing from Derrida). For one thing, Laozi’s other has to do with the *dao,* and there is really nothing that corresponds to it in Levinas. Further, it seems that for Laozi, the *dao* plays a regulative role, adjusting the cosmic forces and guiding human actions (albeit in a way characterized as *wuwei*—more on *wuwei* later). Such metaphysical realism is totally absent in Levinas. However, what is important for my purpose here is that, from the human point of view, both Laozi’s *dao* and Levinas’s other play the same deconstructive role, leading to the same kind of non-foundationalist ethics.

Turning to the first objection, again from the human point of view, the claim that Levinas’s ethics is humanistic and Laozi’s is not is mistaken. It might be thought that such a claim finds support in chapter 25 of the *Daodejing,* where we find the well-known passage: “Man models himself on earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way, And the way on that which is naturally so” (Lau, 1963, 82). Thus the “modeling chain” seems to lead beyond mere human relations. However, I read this passage as saying simply that man should model himself on earth, and what earth and heaven do is their business, as we, from the human point of view, have no way of knowing how they model themselves. Modeling on earth, in turn, means modeling on the earthly manifestations, on the way things are on earth, including inter-human relationships. Read this way, Laozi’s ethics seems to be just as humanistic as Laozi’s.

As for the claim that Laozi’s virtuous sage is nothing like Levinas’s ethical agent in that the latter seeks to benefit others by *acting,* and the former is counseled to do so by *taking no action,* this objection does not take account of Levinas’s description of ethical behavior as “dis-inter-ested” behavior (Levinas, 1998, 36). For Levinas, seeking to benefit others out of some interest, even if it is an interest in their welfare, is egoistic. He calls it an “inter-ested movement of consciousness,” or a movement among *(inter)* the manifestations of being *(esse)* (*ibid.,* xv). To go over to the Other with an interest, even if it is an interest dictated by an ethical theory, is to return to oneself. A truly ethical movement, by contrast, has to be dis-inter-ested, that is, one not based on any articulated interest. It is only by such movement that there is no return to being, that there is satisfaction of the desire for what is otherwise than being, for what is infinite and transcendent. With this in mind, we can read “not contending with the myriad creatures,” or “taking no action” to mean not seeking to benefit others as a means of satisfying an interest, even if it is specified by an ethical teaching that uses words. The truly virtuous person acts to benefit others in a disinterested way, such that the benefits are conferred without the beneficiaries noticing any action having been taken. This is a plausible

reading of “taking no action” to benefit others, more plausible than the interpretation that one should do absolutely nothing. This reading is confirmed by passages where one is advised to act to benefit others in such a way that the “people all say, ‘It happened to us naturally’” (*Daodejing,* ch. XVII; Lau, 1963, 73), where we learn that the sage “excels in saving people” (*Daodejing,* ch. XXVII; Lau, 1963, 84) but in saving them he “leaves no wheel tracks,” “uses no counting rods…no bolts…no cords” *(ibid.)*. Indeed, “the people will benefit a hundredfold” if one does not act out of some determinate interest, including, or perhaps particularly, the interest in cultivating “benevolence” *(ren)* and “rectitude” *(yi)* as spoken of in the teaching that uses words (*Daodejing,* ch. XIX; Lau, 1963, 75). Paradoxically, then, the “man of the highest virtue” is one who “does not keep to virtue” (*Daodejing,* ch. XXXVIII; Lau, 1963, 99). Following Levinas, “not keeping to virtue” can be read as “having no interest in being virtuous.” This, arguably, is the most plausible way of making sense of the seemingly paradoxical advice to “(e)xterminate the sage, discard the wise,…; Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,…” (*Daodejing,* ch. XIX; Lau, 1963, 75). What we are to “exterminate” and “discard” is what is *said*. The ethical conduct, or the virtuous behavior, that is spoken of in the teaching that uses the words of the *said* has been deconstructed by Levinas and Laozi, and the outcome is an ethics more in tune with the *saying* of the Infinite, the “secrets” of the *dao*.

If I am right in this point of comparison between the writings of Levinas and the *Daodejing,* then we can defend the teachings of the latter against the charge that they amount to a withdrawal from the world. Daoism is often compared negatively with Confucianism on this score. Against the former, the latter is often praised for its advocacy of social engagement. However, if we read Laozi’s “taking no action” as “taking no interested action,” or as maintaining a disinterested stance in the Levinasian sense, then a different slant can be put on Laozi’s teachings. In Levinas, disinterestedness is not an indifference toward the others or toward the Infinite, or a withdrawal from them. Indeed, Levinas insists that his notion of disinterestedness “does not signify indifference, but allegiance to the other” (Levinas, 1998, 36). In the same way, we can say that Laozi does not advocate indifference, or withdrawal from social engagement. On the contrary, what is advocated is allegiance to the *dao by way of* acting to benefit our fellow human beings but in such a way as to “leave no wheel tracks.” Interestedness has to be deconstructed and the way to deconstruct it is to be responsible for others without consciously deciding to assume the responsibility, or to be virtuous without actively following the sage and the wise, without consciously following their teachings on benevolence and rectitude.

If I am correct in my reading of the *Daodejing* through the writings of Levinas, the enigmatic first two lines of this work can be compared with Isaiah 65:1, quoted by Levinas: “I am sought of them that asked not for me, I am found of them that sought me not.” To ask for the Way by name is not to seek the real Way; to speak of what one takes to be the Way is not to speak of the eternal Way. There are those who teach of the Way in words, some of whom go on to build ethical theories on the foundation of the Way that they speak of in words. What they say need to be deconstructed if we are to experience the manifestations of the Way. In practice, the deconstruction of the *said* is conducted in the ethical commerce with the Other, in “excelling in saving people.” Seeking to be responsible for the Other is seeking God without asking for Him; excelling in saving people is finding the Way without seeking it. The true sage is one who “knows without having to stir, (i)dentifies without having to see, (a)ccomplishes without having to act”

(*Daodejing,* ch. XLVII; Lau, 1963, 108). In following the true sage, we get “close to the way” (*Daodejing,* ch. VIII; Lau, 1963, 64) because the Way also benefits the “myriad creatures [but] claims no authority;…gives them life yet claims no possession;…benefits them yet exacts no gratitude; …accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit” (*Daodejing,* ch. II, Lau, 1963, 58). We get close to the Way “by means of this” (*Daodejing,* ch. LIV; Lau, 1963, 115). If I am right, it can be said that despite the heavy emphasis on ethics, on *de,* the *Daodejing* is still ultimately a work on ontology, on the nature of the *dao,* and more importantly, on how to attain it. Again if I am right, we can read the *Daodejing* as suggesting that the way to attain the *dao* is the *wuwei* way, that is, not taking any direct actions to attain it, such as inquiring into its nature, seeking its manifestations, measuring its effects and so on. (Any such action would be deconstructed by the *dao* in any case.) Rather, the way to attain it is through ethical action, through *de.*

I have argued in this chapter that the *Daodejing* can be read as a deconstruction of the *de* in the “teachings that use words” similar to the deconstruction of ethics found in the writings of Levinas. For both Laozi and Levinas, ethics is not something that we reason out on the basis of certain suppositions about ourselves and the world, not something that can be said, or learned from the “teachings that use words.” What is said gets deconstructed by the unthematizable other, by the unnameable *dao*. The deconstructive process reveals, in passivity, in *wuwei,* an ethical conduct by which one accomplishes subjectivity, attains sagehood, and comes face to face with the other, the Infinite, the *dao,* without speaking of it or naming it. In a passivity more passive than all passivity, in *wuwei,* everything is accomplished. This is indeed a miracle. The Infinite, the *dao,* through its deconstructive potency, its *de,* is capable of it. As Levinas puts it, the “miracle of creation lies in creating a moral being” (Levinas, 1969, 89).

10
HONGZHOU CHAN BUDDHISM, AND DERRIDA LATE AND EARLY

Justice, ethics, and karma

Robert Magliola

Does the late-phase Derrida's "impossible justice" cross Buddhist justice somehow? Does the so-called "iconoclastic ethic" of Hongzhou Chan Buddhism cross Derridean deconstruction (early- and late-phase) somehow? As a specialist in deconstruction who has published at the intersection of Derridean thought and Asian Buddhism for many years, I take my role here to be an exploration of some samenesses/differences between Derrida and Buddhism in terms of the above questions. On the Derridean side, I shall pay special attention to Derrida's late phase, with its very Hebraic passion for justice (he names it "impossible justice" for reasons we shall shortly discern). On the Buddhist side, I shall focus most on Hongzhou Chan, because of its reputation for iconoclasm in the face of normative ethics. As a question(ing) of justice, the issue of uncanny repetition intervenes too, both in terms of classical Buddhism's *karma*, and as a prevailing Derridean concern.

Jacques Derrida, in his "Le mot d'acceuil" (1997b) and elsewhere, deconstructs the later Emmanuel Levinas, which is to say that Derrida claims to uncover how Levinasian thought actually works in the later writings, despite the surface-claims of Levinasian discourse. In the matter of ethics, what emerges from the Derridean deconstruction of Levinas is the following conclusion on Derrida's part, a conclusion alternative to and more conflicted than Levinas' own declared intention. Derrida concludes that there is "always already" the double-bind[1] of law (responsibility to the third party, the others not singularly facing us) and singularity (responsibility to the unique other who is facing us). Law/singularity constitute a double-bind, argues Derrida, because: [the *bind*]—justice to the third party necessarily violates justice to the singularity of the person-in-situation facing us (and vice versa); and yet [the *double*-bind]—one should *not not*-act but *must* make a decision, since indecision, indifference, etc., reject the call and demand of absolute responsibility. Thus, in Derrida's words, one must necessarily work this "*non*-path" (1990, 947): law/singularity are an *aporia* because they constitute a double-bind, a double-bind driven by an impossible justice. The "experience" of justice is impossible because experience is a holistic structure, i.e., it requires passage through to its own completion. But doing justice to/for someone *inevitably* hurts other(s) unjustly, and vice versa. Given this necessarily incomplete, thwarted structure, the most we can say, concludes Derrida, is that "Justice is an experience of the impossible" *(ibid.)*. *Aporia* literally means "no-passage," i.e., the horns of the bind's dilemma *block* each other, and what makes the bind "double," i.e., that one still must choose, *blocks* the possibility of escape through opting out. For Derrida, one *must* (the *il faut*) decide, choosing what

seems to cause the least collateral damage. One must decide, though one can do so only in blindness, trembling, tears, and hope.

This radical idea is developed in several of the late-phase Derrida's texts, but perhaps the most powerful is his treatment, in *The Gift of Death* (53–81), of the *Akedah* or the "Binding" of Isaac (Genesis 22), the biblical story in which God summons Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (though later the "angel of God" stays Abraham's hand). Søren Kierkegaard famously makes of Abraham's apparent willingness to obey the Divine Command the paradigmatic case of the responsible religious person's unconditional faith as over and against the self-confident ethical person's conditional faith ("conditional" in that it allows universal ethic to preempt the Divine). Emmanuel Levinas refutes Kierkegaard, saying that God is teaching a contrary lesson, namely, that Abraham must know enough—be responsible enough—to realize that the application of a universal law (Kierkegaard's "obedience of faith") should never preempt one's responsibility to the singularity of the other person. Now it is at this point that Derrida interjects, But what of Abraham's beloved wife Sarah? What of *her* singularity? Before taking Isaac up the mount of sacrifice, shouldn't Abraham consult with or at least inform his beloved wife, Isaac's beloved mother? Isn't Abraham necessarily responsible to, answerable to, this mother who so loves her son? Derrida reminds us that "the woman, Sarah, is she to whom nothing is said," and he goes on to ask, quite ironically, "Would the logic of sacrificial responsibility, within the implacable universality of the law [either Kierkegaard's obedience of faith or Levinas's ethic of the face-to-face], of its law, be altered, inflected, attenuated, or displaced, if a woman were to intervene in some consequential manner?" (1996, 76). Either God (in Kierkegaard's reading) or Isaac (in Levinas's reading) is, by implication, the second party[2] to which Abraham's responsibility accrues, but Sarah becomes thereby an irresponsibly treated third singular party.

At one point in his discussion, Derrida invokes his notion of the *à l'instant*, and though we have not space here to explain Derridean "instancy," the application Derrida makes of it in terms of a Kierkegaardian reading is clear. Abraham, Derrida argues, while hoping God will spare Isaac his son (75), must still come to terms, concretely and absolutely, with the possibility that God will not do so: "In essence God says to Abraham: I can see right away *[à l'instant]* that you have understood what absolute duty towards the unique one means,…you have acted on it, you have put it into effect, you were ready to carry it out *at this very instant* (God stops him *at the very instant when there is no more time, where no more time is given,* it is as if Abraham had *already* killed Isaac…) (72, Derrida's emphasis). In this sense, Isaac is "always already"—from the very moment of God's initial command—the unjustly treated third singular party.

The term "the third party" was explicitly introduced by the later-phase Levinas, who increasingly came to recognize that his ethic of the face-to-face (the non-symmetrical relation whereby one is absolutely responsible to the singular "other") has as co-originary with it a responsibility, in the name of justice, to everyone else. Levinas seems to believe that the demand of the face-to-face and the demand for justice of the third party can be reconciled. Derrida emphatically denies the possibility of such a reconciliation. In *The Gift of Death,* he addresses—as we have just seen—the third party as the unreconciled but personally known singularity (the excluded Sarah), but also as the gathering of all the

unreconciled, personally unknown or anonymous singularities (the *autres autrui*, the other others):

> As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others. I offer a gift of death, I betray,…"
>
> (*Ibid.*, 68)

The most one can do (and should do) is try to choose the option that causes proportionately the lesser hurt (though even this choice necessarily cannot be certain: one cannot even be certain of what is happening, and much less so can one be certain of what will happen).

That Derrida intends so stark a conclusion, i.e., that the doing of justice for someone necessarily and inevitably violates the just claims of other(s), has not been received unflinchingly. Geoffrey Bennington seems to restrict Derridean "inevitability" here to a quasi-structural necessity. Bennington argues, and I agree at this point, that for Derrida it is aprioristically necessary that ethics be "essentially pervertible" (2000, 42):

> The logic here, which is just what is elsewhere formulated as the quasi-transcendental, states in general a complicity (even an identity) between conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility, such that the *necessary possibility* of the failure, compromise or contamination of the supposedly (or desiredly) pure case is sufficient to justify the thought that that purity is *already* compromised in its very formulation.
>
> (*Ibid.*, 41)

Such a formulation is not purely aprioristic, of course, and indeed here is the crux of it, because the *a priori* cannot be strictly separated from the empirical. Thus Bennington continues:

> This production of a condition of possibility is the aspect of the analysis that prompts its qualification as transcendental. But its specifically quasi-transcendental character means that, as always in deconstructive thought, it is impossible rigorously to separate the transcendental from the factical or the empirical, and this entails that, uncomfortably, I cannot use the transcendental aspect of the analysis to provide *a priori* knowledge of which empirical cases, which events arriving, in fact constitute acts of perversion or perversity.
>
> (*Ibid.*, 42)

Which is to say that some empirical cases, arriving, may *not* constitute acts of perversion. Indeed, Bennington goes on, "Ethics means, then, on this view, that I know *a priori* that ethics is constitutively pervertible, but that I *never know* in advance when it is perverted

in fact" (*Ibid.,* 43). Which is to say that it may turn out, sometimes, that ethics is not perverted in fact, that is, does not unjustly hurt a third party.

In my more radical reading of Derrida's intention here (and John Caputo and others share my view), because ethics is always already contaminated, any and every concrete case must entail some perversion, that is, the hurting of someone (or some people) unjustly. Caputo tends to identify the third party less with a third singularity and more exclusively with the "other others" or assembly of other singularities, thus—in my opinion—enabling the offender to excuse himself/herself too easily,[3] but no doubt Caputo's reading, like mine, takes injustice to the third party as inevitable, horrendous and inevitable:

> Isaac thus occupies the place of all others, of the ethical community, of the *oikos* and *Sittlichkeit,* of the bonds I have to everyone else whose needs I do not address when I respond to the singular other who claims me in this instant, every instant, day in and day out. If I help to feed and clothe *this* other, the one who is before me now, I abandon all the other others to their nakedness and starvation. If I attend to my children, I sacrifice the children of other parents. If I feed my cat, do I not sacrifice all the other cats in the world who die in hunger?[4]
>
> (Caputo, 1997b, 204)

As is well known, recently in Buddhist Studies the nature of Hongzhou Chan in particular has been the subject of lively debate, with some scholars emphasizing the iconoclastic or even antinomian depictions that have come down to us in the form of the pertaining encounter-dialogues, and other scholars interpreting the dialogues as actually more informative about the tenth-century society wherein they were compiled (composed?) than the eighth-century *saṃgha* where they allegedly took place. Whatever the merits of the respective arguments in this debate, it certainly is the case that some Buddhologists and comparative philosophers have compared the Hongzhou School's alleged antinomianism to an analogous antinomianism in Derridean deconstruction. The late-phase Derrida is said to annul a normative ethics, replacing it with a non-institutionalized or radically situational ethics. In short, impossible justice is understood not to highlight the agonized recognition that any decision requires the sacrifice of a third party (but must be acted upon anyway), but rather, is understood to militate for an antinomian justice. This is where I balk, arguing instead that Derrida continues, to the very end of his career, the "same" deconstructive project he first broached in his early phase (though no doubt his late phase directs this project to more overt themes of justice, which is to say Derrida deconstructs authors and institutions dealing more overtly with justice/ethics). That Derrida continues the same deconstructive project is a crucial point for our topic, because it enables us to see how the deconstructive mode does not and cannot replace the body in which it acts: rather, it displaces but necessarily retains the body, the body that—in the case of ethics—is an institutionalized ethics.[5]

Derrida, in his late-phase work, "Du droit à la philosophic d'un point de vue cosmopolitique" (a lecture given for UNESCO in 1991), and in his contributions to a subsequent roundtable on this same text (see Derrida, 2002a), continues to make clear that deconstruction must necessarily work as it always has: deconstruction as such does

not construct, but rather, displaces from within a structure already there. Thus Derrida specifies, "I think that thinking is always also compelled by institutional norms and forms, and displaces them" (*ibid.,* 39); and Peter Pericles Trifonas, the translator and editor of Derrida's UNESCO lecture, asserts in his commentary, "deconstruction nevertheless must remain hopelessly and forever tied to the normative discourse of metaphysics" (*ibid.,* 64). Tellingly, when Professor Birus (during the roundtable discussion), in an attempt at clarification, remarks that a philosophical or thinking event is "related to institutions, but not defined by them," Derrida answers in a way that retains the role of institutionalization, saying "Not *exhausted,* not *exhausted* by them" (my emphasis) (*ibid.,* 39).

Elsewhere in the same text, Derrida remonstrates, "Don't think too quickly that I'm on the side of deconstruction against philosophy. We shouldn't give up this effort to universality and to try to think what's happening in science [and] politics, and to formalize [philosophy's] own language, and so on and so forth. That's why deconstruction is nothing against philosophy" (*ibid.,* 51, bracketed words are translator's clarification of slurred audiotape). Particularly in French, but in English too, "nothing against philosophy" is a pun, because deconstruction is a "nothing" rather than a "something." And we always need *something* (a language's shared grammar and pool of meaning-units are its "somethings," for example). Deconstruction is a *nothing* because its role is to insert itself into a something—in our case at hand a normative/institutional structure—and, by penetrating to its subtext, to find out how it really works (how it really works usually contradicts its surface-claims). Deconstruction is a "nothing" because it strictly limits itself to the assumptions and methodology of the structure it deconstructs, and tests if that structure is rationally consistent with *its own* protocols and pretensions. In most cases, deconstruction finds that a structure works otherwise than the way it claims, so the deconstructionist proceeds to uncover the "alternative solution"—buried in the debris of the deconstruction—which better enables the structure to work without contradiction. But it can never work without some contradiction, so the alternative solution comes *sous rature,* "under erasure," i.e., "under the X," which does not mean cancellation, but rather, preparedness for deconstruction in turn.[6]

Indeed, Derrida's deconstructive strategy, as described above, plays itself out again and again in his UNESCO lecture of 1991. He insists on the necessity of the philosophical "body," saying that the liberation of philosophy from English-language hegemony "is not a matter of promoting an abstractly universal philosophical thought that does not inhere in the body of the idiom…" (2002a, 12). He deconstructs what he calls the "fundamentally cultural, colonial, or neocolonial dialectic of appropriation and alienation" which has marked philosophy, a dialectic wherein "appropriation" means "making one's own what belongs to the other" and "alienation" means "the invention of new modes of thought…" (*ibid.,* 10). This dialectic, when deconstructed, shows itself to be "appropriation as expropriation" he says, because *in fact* appropriation and alienation are *reinscribed* into each other.[7] Here, very typically, Derrida takes the word "expropriation" in two competing senses: to "expropriate" is to take someone else's ownness "out" *(ex)* of that someone; and to "expropriate" is to be *ex* or "outside of" one's own ownness.

Philosophy from the "cosmopolitical point of view" should not try to mediate (i.e., make a synthesis of) the dialectic, because the dialectic functions only on the surface

level, while underneath, the opposites are reinscribed into each other. Rather, an "alternative solution under erasure" can be found in the debris of the deconstruction, and Derrida coins a phrase for it, namely, "ex-appropriation." When addressing the problematic of hegemony, this should be philosophy's "other way," he says. Not "expropriation" but "ex-appropriation":

> There are other ways for philosophy than those of appropriation as expropriation (to lose one's memory by assimilating the memory of the other, the one being opposed to the other, as if an *exappropriation* were not possible, indeed the only possible chance).
>
> (*Ibid.*, 10, Derrida's emphasis)

Here Derrida is opting for one of the terms of the deconstructed opposition "appropriation versus alienation," and putting it under the sign of *ex* in at least two senses: *ex* as "withdraw from,"[8] so one "withdraws from" appropriation; and *ex* as the X (pronounced "ex" in English) of *sous-rature,* so "appropriation" comes under erasure, allowing some traces of borrowed otherness to remain.[9] The reformed institutional norms *must* try to approximate "ex-appropriation," and be designed to remain open to further change. Indeed, society must take the chance of committing to such ethical norms, knowing all the while that these institutionalizations will require ongoing and unpredictable deconstructions (this is not to deny that what is in excess of institutionalization should be what beckons and motivates: there is thus a Derridean "madness," itself the fall-out of his deconstructions of Nietzsche and others).

In short, what I argue, above, is that Derrida is not iconoclastic: he does not break icons; rather, (to continue the analogy), he deconstructs them, i.e., he keeps but variously displaces and unsettles them. The point I proceed to now is the further claim that Derrida, despite his staying "with the body" or "bodies," i.e., norms-in-common, institutionalized codes of law, etc., nonetheless describes them in such heterogeneous terms, and so indeterminately, that their workability, their practicality, their ability to deliver justice, are gravely threatened. Indeed, Simon Critchley (1999) and others have demonstrated at great length the unsatisfactory nature of Derridean ethics in this regard. Simply put, "ex-appropriation" is not antinomian but surely as a norm it is too imprecise, too ambiguous (and the same can be said—if space permitted here—of Derrida's other "alternative solutions" in the field of ethics). How, for example, can Derridean ex-appropriation adjudicate the respective grievances of the Muslims and the Orthodox Christian Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, the scene of international interventions over the past decade (and ongoing)? That is, how can Derridean ex-appropriation, which is designed to effect the dismantling of hegemony, adjudicate the aftermath of Serbian hegemony over the Muslims sharing the same geographical area? There is evidence that some Serbian institutions which were and are innocent of committing atrocities were and are being nonetheless injured as a by-product of international arbitrations trying to restore justice to the persecuted Muslims. If, using Derridean "recalling" of the injured third party, we try to restore justice to forgotten but innocent Serbian entities, how to sort them out from the non-innocent Serbian entities which perpetrated ethnic cleansing? Obviously a very determinate institutionalized ethics is required, or judgments can easily become random or prejudicial.

Hongzhou Chan, at least as it has been represented since the mid-tenth century by the established tradition, featured the shock-tactics which have become paradigmatic for Chinese Chan; and Hongzhou's founder, Mazu Daoyi (709–88 CE), has been identified with deconstruction of the "reified ethics" attributed to other Buddhist schools. Whether or not Hongzhou Chan was as iconoclastic as later Chan orthodoxy claimed, or whether or not even the iconoclasm as orthodoxy represented it was as iconoclastic as some academic discourses have made it out to be, the fact remains that (what is said to be) Mazu Daoyi's signature doctrine of Buddha-mind[10] itself runs the grave risk of antinomianism. This is because Mazu's Buddha-mind, as it is represented in the encounter-dialogues, means an empty mind,[11] so one is not attached even to good deeds or specifically religious practices;[12] and Mazu's Buddha-mind means ordinary mind,[13] so one ordinarily lives a natural, spontaneous, and simple life without recourse to heroic asceticism, hyper-speculation, or what Mazu regards as other kinds of either moral or intellectual scrupulosity. I affiliate with that rather large body of opinion, Chinese and non-Chinese, ancient, modern, and in between, which has maintained that a heavy emphasis on Mazu's version of Buddha-mind lends itself to grave social abuse unless it is proportionately counterbalanced by other Buddhist teachings (sometimes it has been and sometimes it has not been). I shall address, in what follows, the matter of a counter-doctrine which is ensconced in the Hongzhou School itself, but first let us examine Mazu's Buddha-mind a bit more closely, especially insofar as it compares to/ contrasts with Derrida's "impossible justice."

Mazu Daoyi's doctrine of Buddha-mind is intended to teach that the enlightened mind is the unattached mind, so that one realizes all phenomena, good as well as bad, pure as well as defiled, pleasurable as well as painful, healthy as well as sickly, and so on, are *empty*, and thus equally the Buddha-nature. By perfect non-attachment to anything, one accesses the Buddha-nature, which is the true nature of any and every thing. The Hongzhou master typically kept the vows, the precepts, and other prescribed norms, but Hongzhou teaching allowed him to violate these if such were situationally required to truly teach or compassionate others in a given instance. In brief, the enlightened teacher can break the rules if by so doing the teacher can best teach non-attachment. In the field of ethics, Buddha-mind functions in particular to cut off attachment to good karma, and such an aim is—in Buddhist teaching going back to the earliest sutras—laudable and authentic indeed. That is, even normatively good karma makes, and even *is*, bad karma if we are *attached* to our good works or the karmic project. This notion seems to veer close to Derrida's assertion that even the doing of good causes evil to someone, but in the Buddhist case, the immediate scenario here is self-reflexive rather than oriented towards the other. The apparent good deed is actually bad for the person doing it (though presumably that same deed as normatively good can be helpful to someone else if said recipient receives it with proper intention). The Buddhist ideal is to act *without* karma, and a Buddhist can argue that this state of empty mind or non-attachment enables escape from Derrida's agonized double-bind, since perfectly free (i.e., non-attached) acts cannot—in ultimate terms—cause harm to anyone.[14] In fact, however, for the Buddhist the Derridean double-bind as such cannot even arise, since the Dharmic machinery of the world is perfectly just. Buddhism holds that from the ultimate perspective, deeds cannot cause unjust injury to the subject or to others: the world's cosmic causality is so arranged that sentient beings get back what they sow (though this justice may be calculated out

over many many rebirths). Thus, in an intriguing twist, the Buddha-mind by cutting off causality finally merits liberation as its just consequence.

For Derrida, the machinery of the world is perverse: even the best-intentioned act inevitably does real and irremediable injustice to someone. Buddhism, unlike Derridean philosophy, is *intention*-driven: intention (on the part of the subject and the recipient) determines effect in terms of one's ultimate liberation. For Buddhism, the Dharmic machinery (the Law of the Universe) is perfectly just, and Chan Buddhism stresses that only empty intention (intention-free intention, or mind not attached to itself) liberates. Behavior *with* attachment throws up obstacles, and—it is worth noting—mixed behavior (i.e., a mix of attached and unattached behavior) throws up obstacles insofar as it is mixed.

In regard to Buddha-mind, or rather, Mazu's version of Buddha-mind, in relation to possible social abuse, the problem—reduced to the pith—is this: even if Buddhism were to be institutionalized somehow at the juridico-political level, there is no workable way to publicly adjudicate who has truly the Buddha-mind. Nor, in the public forum at large, should there be, since to establish such a role for Buddha-mind would conflate social legislation, be it civil, criminal, or political, and its attendant morality, with the invisible and empirically non-verifiable workings of Buddhist Dharma. Such a distinction between the juridico-political and the Dharmic may seem self-evident and to "go without saying," but in point of fact, Hongzhou Chan, at least according to the *textus receptus* of the encounter-dialogues, selectively invoked this conflation upon occasion, as if a master's empty intention could breach public law without recrimination. Not that this happened often[15]—it could not have. Hongzhou Chan's teaching on Buddha-mind almost always operated within the social frame of a Confucianist society whose determinate ethics tempered Chan's excesses; and within the *saṃgha* the teaching of Buddha-mind could dare to play, without serious mishap, against the longstanding monastic framework of precepts and protocols *in situ*. Nonetheless, doctrinally and *prima facie*, this teaching of Buddha-mind requires a counterbalancing doctrine within the ideational structure of Chan, or the potential for serious breach remains: unscrupulous Chan figures can too easily point to Buddha-mind as the rationale justifying unethical behavior. I would propose that the counterbalancing doctrine is the teaching of Nāgārjuna's "two truths."

Mazu's interpretation of Buddha-mind, especially insofar as it emphasizes absolute non-attachment, derives from the Indian Buddhist founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, Nāgārjuna and his teaching of *paramārtha-satya* (supreme truth), which declares that the mundane is truly empty of self-inherence and other-dependency. All distinctions and discriminations are truly empty, so from the vantage point of this supreme truth there is no distinction between good and bad. Since attachment is always to a perceived good, the goal of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamikan *ascesis* is perfect non-attachment, which in a more Chanist register comes to be often called the "goal-less goal" or "no mind." The kindred Chan notion of "ordinary mind" derives from Nāgārjuna's famous assertion, "There is not the slightest difference/Between cyclic existence [*saṃsāra*] and nirvāṇa. /There is not the slightest difference/Between nirvāṇa and cyclic existence" (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXV: 19; Garfield, 1995, 331), which is interpreted to mean that one is to realize the supreme truth precisely in the ordinary world all the while one is doing the ordinary and natural human activities—eating, working, sleeping, etc. (this is sometimes called the "non-duality" of samsara and nirvana). The already-realized or

liberated person lives and moves, without attachment, in the mundane world, the concrete and relative. The doctrine of two truths itself refers to *paramārtha-satya* (supreme truth) and *saṃvṛti-satya* (conventional truth[16]), typically represented in Chinese by the terms *zhendi* and *shidi* respectively. It is crucial to recognize that the two truths for the Madhyamaka are not Reality but, rather, two standpoints, or better put, two interpretations of Reality. Thus Reality can be non-dual (in the above-described sense) but interpreted as either empty or conventional. That is, Reality can be interpreted in such a way as to sort out the nirvanic and the samsaric, though in Reality it is the case that "samsara is nirvana" and "nirvana is samsara."

As early as 409 CE, Kumārajīva had translated Nāgārjuna's *mūlamadhyamakakārikā* into Chinese. Sengzhao (374–414), Kumārajīva's foremost disciple and collaborator, and the first Chinese Madhyamikan to produce a large body of doctrinal work, completed his first essay, *Prajñā is Non-Knowing* (Ch. *Boruo wuzhi lun*) as early as 405 CE. This essay explains the role of non-knowing precisely within the context of the Madhyamikan two truths,[17] and his subsequent essays also involve the two truths.[18] By the second half of the sixth century CE, Sengzhao's writings, which had circulated separately, were brought together to form a single text, the *Zhao lun (Treatise of Zhao),* and the *Zhao lun* becomes well known throughout Chinese Buddhism. Thus, even without having recourse to Jizang and the second wave of Chinese Mādhyamika (sixth-seventh century CE), one can show that the teaching of the two truths was available for centuries before the rise of Hongzhou Chan (eighth century CE), and there is evidence—which I shall cite momentarily—that the Hongzhou School itself invoked it upon occasion.

The advantage of the two truths as an effective counterbalance to Mazu's stress on non-attached or empty mind is the following: the *status* of social legislation remains in place precisely because conventionally it belongs to *saṃvṛti-satya*, the samsaric interpretation of Reality;[19] that all at once, from the ultimate or supreme perspective, the same social legislation is empty does not threaten its conventional status any more than—for a Mādhyamikan (or Chanist)—an apple, say, is less a tangible and unique apple because it is ultimately empty. Social legislation belongs to the conventional and is conventionally applicable even while as ultimate truth the Buddhist Dharma also applies, enabling non-attached or empty (in this sense) persons to freely move within conventions that appear empirically unaltered, and enabling attached persons to make (proportionately to their attachment) better or worse karma for themselves. It can even be argued that the Buddhist Dharma *needs* the samsaric, the mundane, the conventional (including the civic law) so that the karmic engine, the process of "purification from defilements," can invisibly do its work. Thus the doctrine of two truths, while affirming one Reality, justifies a sorting out of ultimate (nirvanic) and relative (samsaric) perspectives in such wise as to shore up the status quo. Buddhist masters can still make interventions in the public arena for the suspension of unjust social legislation, but they must argue on the basis of the conventional, i.e., the practicably demonstrable. And Buddhist masters can still teach apposite situational bracketing out of moral codes, but when this bracketing violates social legislation, all the perpetrating parties must be willing to incur the conventional public penalties.

In short, discriminating between the two truths, ultimate and relative—even while accommodating some dissent—has the "deep-structure" effect of justifying institutionalized or normative ethics. Thus when we find, even in the records of early

Hongzhou Chan, an occasional encounter-dialogue (apocryphal or not) whose specific lesson is the two truths, I argue its function, at the level of deep structure, was to correct a shift towards antinomianism which was becoming, at a given time and place, or in the specific spiritual life of a given disciple, simply too perilous to risk. And here is an example of such a dialogue, one between Dongsi Ruhui, a Hongzhou master and himself a first generation disciple of Mazu, and a student:

> As Gentleman He entered the temple, he noticed a sparrow making droppings on the head of an image of Buddha, and asked the Master, “Has the sparrow the Buddha-nature or not?” The Master answered, “Yes!” Gentlemen He asked, “Then why does it make droppings on the head of a Buddha?” The Master replied, “Does it make droppings on the head of a hawk?”
>
> (Blyth, 1974, 27[20])

Here the disciple limits himself to one perspective only, the ultimate or absolute. The disciple is asking: If the sparrow itself has Buddhahood, why does it not know that it should not desecrate the Buddha? But the Master abruptly summons the disciple back to the relative, teaching him there are two truths and to *discriminate* between the truths. The Master in effect replies: The mundane sparrow knows that in the empirical world the insentient statue of Buddha can do no harm and be done no harm, whereas the hawk can eat the sparrow the moment the sparrow approaches. (And the Master is further implying a moral precept: Watch out for that bad hawk!) If the Master were here teaching the radical non-attachment of empty mind, his reply would be quite different. Mazu’s doctrine of non-attachment, as shown earlier, emphasizes ultimate truth, and ultimate truth is *unconditioned:* thus one should *not* discriminate. Indeed, one should not even discriminate between ultimate and relative. If the Master were emphasizing unattached mind and therefore non-discrimination here, he would have replied with a phrase such as, Buddha making droppings on Buddha—all is Buddha, or an analogous phrase stressing oneness or identity.

Having noted all the above, however, we must not—long-range—tilt the structural balance against Mazu’s freely roving Buddha-mind either. As Vincent Shen has convincingly argued, the danger in most of the sinified forms of Chinese Buddhism is that they tend to be too “immanentist” (Shen, 2003), thus affirming the mundane world “as it is” no matter what. In the Chinese context, the doctrine of two truths, for example, can become a convenient pretext for perpetuating the status quo even when drastic social intervention—be it in the private or public arena—is morally required. The doctrine can be distorted to mean one should always let the juridico-political, since it “only” belongs to relative (samsaric) truth, go its own mundane way no matter what; and the applicability of *paramārtha-satya* (supreme truth), for its part, is—according to this interpretation—limited to the mere recognition that the juridico-political order is ultimately empty. Thus, without Mazu’s competing perception of non-attachment as freedom to challenge ossified and even immoral codes, forms of institutionalized social injustice can prevail.

In summary, I believe we can conclude that Mazu’s antinomianism requires/required a structural counterweight, that in the eighth century such a counterweight was already at

hand in the form of the two truths, and that—at its best—the doctrine of Buddha-mind plays the role of *provocateur* within a structure larger than itself. Indeed it is worth remarking here that the provocative role of Mazu's Buddha-mind bears more than a striking resemblance to the Derridean project as we have described it, i.e., a "staying with the body" or structure larger than itself ("parasitism" in this sense) in order to provoke it, and "shake it down" (knowing the body's secrets and thus blackmailing it until it agrees to face its own hidden assumptions). I argue, though, that what we have called the "alternative solutions," the spin-offs which issue from this process, whether they be of Mazu's or Derrida's sort, can be sometimes very risky for the body of ethics: like free radicals, their indeterminacy can drive the body to a fatal entropy at the end.

Earlier on, this chapter addressed the problematic of the ethical in terms of the "publicly available" on the one hand, and the "invisible and empirically non-verifiable machinery of Buddhist Dharma" (i.e., karmic justice) on the other. I conclude by revisiting the topic via one of the most intriguing intersections of Derrida, Derridean deconstruction, and Buddhism. Derrida's deconstructions work at both the discursive and stylistic levels, and these levels—as one would expect in Derrida—interact and subvert each other in extremely sophisticated ways. Because his writings have reached most of his readers only in English translation, his *stylisme* and its crucially important role have been largely ignored. I have in several publications treated Derrida's style at some length (especially in Magliola, 2001; also 1985, and 1997, 157–65), demonstrating how the style almost always works to dissolve organicities addressed at the discursive level, and—I contend—to dissolve these organicities in singularly *Buddhist* ways (not that Derrida intended the Buddhism: rather, deconstructive style necessarily works Buddhistically).

One of the marks of Derrida's *stylisme* is the "floating graphic trait," which in Derrida's texts leaves in its wake a non-substantive and sometimes *uncanny* trail. By "graphic trait" Derrida means a consonant cluster insofar as it is independent of whatever meaning-unit it happens (in conjunction with a vowel or vowels) to constitute *ad hoc*. Elsewhere I have described the floating graphic trait in some detail, and I here quote:

> For example, if I am pursuing in English the consonant cluster tr-, I may find in one paragraph the words "transfer," "intransitive," "pantry," "poltroon," "train," "subtract," "tree," and "tref"… But what is interesting us here is whatever import the consonant cluster has independent of its vowel association. Thus the tr- goes on, whether it closes into a series of syllables sharing the same root (e.g., "*trans*fer" "in*trans*itive," "*train,*" come from the Latin root syllable tra-, "through," "across") or whether into a syllable coming from a different root (and, in the case of "tref," "ritually impure," coming from even a non-Sanskritic [Hebrew] Ur-root).
> (Magliola, 2001, ¶28)

Dissociated from its morphemic unit, the graphic trait "floats." Pursued as independent from its syllabic connections and therefore from its semantic, the graphic trait has no self-identical meaning as such: its repetitions stream across the page, marking an empty and discontinuous but still traceable path. Derrida seems most fascinated when a sequence of text generates abnormal concentrations of a given graphic trait.[21] Especially in the "Envois" section of *La carte postale* (1980) and throughout *Glas* (1974), Derrida

intentionally plays his own game of multiplying floating graphic traits, in particular the tr-trait, the gr-trait, and the gl-trait. For Derrida, their cascading paths act out, like empty performatives, those uncanny episodes in our life-texts which repeat too frequently for mere chance but too inchoately to make holistic sense. They are textual *effets* but written from "off the page":[22] they are unknowables.

Translating Derrida's textual theatre, here, into Buddhist terms, and making the application to the ethical, the following scenario unfolds. The semantic level represents the realm where public, normative ethics apply. The movement of a given graphic trait (as one tracks its repetitions, its path across the pages) enacts the invisible and empirically unverifiable machinery of karma. Disproportionately frequent concentrations of a given graphic trait, when they arise, enact those uncanny repetitions in our lives which we cannot interpret but which (we sense) somehow signal the hidden exactitudes of our personal karma. For according to Buddhist teaching, most people, even the most devout, cannot know their past lives, their present karma, etc.: only those in an advanced state of enlightenment can clearly cognize the workings of karmic justice.

In Derridean writing, there are several other stylistic features which can also be said—from a Buddhist point of view—to figuratively enact karmic connection. (Let the reader be assured that Buddhist readings of Derrida's style, though figurative here, are not being inappropriately or recklessly foisted on his style and philosophy, vitiating them: there are very real likenesses between Derridean thought and performance and Buddhist thought and performance which justify what we are doing, especially because of Derridean thematic parameters such as trace, *dénégation*, and the deconstruction of holism, and because of Derridean style with its Talmudic word-play so congenial to Chanist word-play.[23]) Three of these features are homonyms, homophones, and homographs, all three of which often signal crucial nodes in his textual thought. Homonyms are words spelled and pronounced alike but differing in lexic meaning; homophones are words pronounced alike but differing in lexic meaning or spelling; homographs are words spelled alike but differing in lexic meaning or pronunciation. In order to further deconstruct over-confidence in symmetrical pairing, Derrida sometimes complicates matters by generating what I call *off*-versions of these three features, i.e., versions which *almost* match but do not exactly match any of the three above definitions. One of Derrida's favorite off-matches, for example, are the off-homophones *aigle*/Hegel.

In Jerusalem in 1986 Derrida gave a lecture that triggered a series of events allowing me to end this chapter with an anecdote at once very Derridean and (in Buddhist terms) very karmic, an anecdote questioning still more—it seems to me—our questioning of Derridean and Buddhist justices. In 1987 Derrida's longer French version of the Jerusalem lecture was published, entitled "Comment ne pas parler—Dénégations" (1987). Throughout much of this work the off-homophones *dénie/Denys* (the final s is silent in French) play a crucial role, and I went on to exegete "Dénégations" and *dénie/Denys* in a section of my own pertaining book (1997:157–65), where I trace how Derrida riffs off *dénie* ("denies") to *Denys* (Dionysius, the Greek god) to *Denys l'Aréopagite* (Dionysius the Areopagite, pseudonym of fifth-century Christian mystic), and so on, and I allude (*ibid.,* 162) to *St Denys* (St. Denis, third-century Christian martyr, Patron Saint of France). St. Denis was decapitated, and one of his emblems is the *four* (Fr. "furnace"): "decapitation" and *four* are two key figures of Derrida's thought/style. In summer 1997, to acknowledge the gift-copy of my new book which I had sent him,

Derrida wrote me a long and generous appreciation, though I had not counted on a reply. Indeed, according to Derrida's logic of giving, which his works explain in several places (and especially in *The Gift of Death*[24]), a giver's expectation of acknowledgement spoils the gift. Ideally, the giver should so arrange matters that s/he cannot be thanked.

Derrida's death on 9 October 2004 meant many things to many people, but, amidst the sorrow, one of its several messages to me was a gift—namely, the calendar date and its connection to Derrida, "Dénégations," and me. For 9 October is the feast day of St. Denis, Patron Saint of France. And dear Jacques Derrida was not there for me to thank.

Too sad that the text did not just now finish, but even in the giving of gifts, Derrida would say, and even if unknown, there is a third party to be forever remembered—the third party that was sacrificed.

Hongzhou Chan Buddhism, how does it cross Derridean thought here? If a giver expects acknowledgement, Mazu could say: Big mistake! Where is your unattached mind, your empty mind?[25] If a giver to a second grieves that the gift hurts an unknown third, Mazu could say: Big mistake! Where is your ordinary mind?[26]—responses which may or may not actually open the questions with which we began.

Notes

1 For the Derridean theory of double-bind, see Magliola, 1997, 100–2 *et passim*.

2 I am retaining here a conventional format in which the first party is the acting singularity, the second partay is the singular face "facing" the actor, and the third party is the "other" not facing the actor. However, Levinas's priorities are such that actors are asymmetrically related to the face facing them: thus the face facing an actor is, in terms of priority, more properly called the first party and transcends the actor. And in Kierkegaard's case, God is, in terms of priority, more properly called the first party.

3 That is, in favoring one person, one can shrug off collateral hurt to others, salving one's conscience by thinking, Well, someone [a/the third party] always gets hurt anyway, somebody is always betrayed. Such a mind-set neutralizes precisely the anguished sensitivity that Derrida intends to heighten.

4 Caputo is here, in his own way, paraphrasing Derrida.

5 For more on Derrida's "staying with the body," see my response to E.H.Jarow's paper in Magliola, 2006.

6 For Derrida's deconstructive process, and for "alternative solution *sous rature*," see Magliola, 1984, 18–20, 35; and 1997, 71–2.

7 "Mutual reinscription" in Derrida means that oppositional values relate chiasmically on the subtextual level, so here, for example, "appropriation" has "alienation" buried within it, as its subtext; and "alienation" has "appropriation" buried within it, as its subtext. Chan Buddhism's *gongan* often use mutual reinscription too (see examples and discussion, Magliola, 1990, 88–93).

8 As in "former" footballer, "ex"-footballer.

9 All this is analogous to the early-phase Derrida's "pure signifier" (= "signifer alone"), his alternative solution after the deconstruction of the dyad, "signifier and signified." "Signifer alone" necessarily came under the X too. See Magliola, 1984, 26–7. And for Buddhism's analogous "pure effect" (= "effect alone"), see Magliola, 1997, 139–42.

10 For a discussion of Mazu's Buddha-mind, see Jan Y.-h., 1981, 467–8.

11 See Chappell, 1988, 198, where he cites and discusses the canonical Mazu's assertion, "The nature of all dharmas neither arises nor ceases. All dharmas are fundamentally empty and quiet." See also Mazu's famous "No Buddha" *gongan* (Case XXXIII of the *Wumenguan*)

and the pertaining discussion in Blyth, 1974, 228–31. Further quotations traditionally attributed to Mazu on the unattached or empty mind can be found in Blyth, 1970, 21, 25–6, 29.

12 For quotations from Mazu on detachment even from the quest for good karma, and discussion, see Fung, 1953, 391–4, 400.

13 For citations of Mazu on ordinary mind, and discussion, see Chang, 1967, 42–3 and Faure, 1993, 202.

14 Chan belongs to that majority current within Mahāyāna that affirms universal liberation: we are all incipient Buddhas and will attain Buddhahood eventually. Of course the unenlightened disciple can misappropriate even the unattached action of an enlightened teacher, but then the bad karma that would accrue to the disciple would be a justified consequence.

15 But it must have happened often enough to arouse the attention of Zongmi (780–841), the great Huayan scholar monk who was known for his ethical critique of Hongzhou Chan's weaknesses and abuses. Zongmi may have had a vested interest in negatively critiquing Hongzhou, but surely the criticism testified to quite a few unsavory incidents. For the pertaining doctrinal controversy, see Gregory, 1988, 224–5.

16 *Saṃvṛti-satya* also can mean "concealing truth" because its appearances conceal emptiness from the unenlightened person. For the ambiguity in Sanskrit of *saṃvṛti-satya*, see Garfield's commentary in Nāgārjuna, Garfield, 1995, 297.

17 See Liu (1994, 43, 45, 48) quoting Sengzhao on the two truths in *Prajna is Non-Knowing*. Note that a non-Madhyamikan Buddhist version of the two truths had already come to China by the second century CE via the translation of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (*ibid.*, 47), and the two truths were paralleled with Neo-Taoist teachings on non-attachment and non-discrimination (*ibid.*, 41).

18 Especially his *Nirvana is Nameless* (Ch. *Niepan wuming lun*) does so. See Liu, 1994, 73.

19 For more on the Buddhist allocation of conventional ethics not to supreme but to mundane truth, see the second part of my response to G.Horowitz's paper in Magliola, 2006.

20 I supply an English translation directly from Blyth's Chinese-language script for this *gongan*.

21 See in particular Derrida's essay "+ R (Into the Bargain)" in Derrida, 1978b, and the interview "Du Tout" in Derrida, 1980, for his discussions of this kind of occurrence.

22 The notion of "off the page" does not contradict Derridean intertextuality, because what is "off the page" is also textual in Derrida's sense.

23 By now, a well-known corpus of literature has already accumulated, confirming many sorts of intersection between Buddhism and Derrida. For Chanist word-play in relation to Derrida, see Magliola, 1988.

24 (1996, 96–7); on p. 95 Derrida and his translator also supply in a footnote exact references to his other treatments of the same topic.

25 That is, you are attached to your good karma, thus making bad karma.

26 That is, just eat when you eat, just sleep when you sleep, just give gifts when you give gifts,…the rest is "too much thinking" (for the justice of Dharma, hidden but pure and smooth, accomplishes its work anyway).

11
TRANSGRESSION AND ETHICS OF TENSION

Wŏnhyo and Derrida on institutional authority

Jin Y.Park

There is a seduction in harmony. Be it in the world, in one's life, or in ethical discourses, envisioning harmony continues to be a very powerful tool and vision to the human mind—like a textual coherence that has been an attraction to philosophers and readers alike. Why is a harmony so seductive and, more importantly, what do we mean by "harmony" when we envision it in the context of ethics? In this chapter, against our desire for a harmony, I shall propose an awareness of an intrinsic tension as a groundless grounding of an ethical paradigm in Wŏnhyo's (617–86) Mahāyāna Buddhism and Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) deconstructive ethics. I shall first focus on Wŏnhyo's writings on bodhisattva precepts to outline his Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics, then I shall interpret them in connection with Derrida's discussion on violence and the law. The philosophies of both Wŏnhyo and Derrida share a non-substantialist position and thus mark the limits of normative ethics. The ethical in their non-substantialist philosophy becomes possible with an awareness of a tension between the provisional and the ultimate level of ethical discourses. The ethics of tension, however, does not negate a harmony or an order *per se;* rather, it brings our attention to its horizon, in which harmony or order exists only through its insecurity and incompleteness. In this context, I shall also bring in the "mad monk" tradition of East Asian Buddhism, which seems to exemplify this tension of the ethical embodied in an individual's life.

1 Mad monks and the life of/for violation

Understanding Wŏnhyo in the Korean Buddhist tradition has been dominated by the image of a free thinker. As the overly exploited expression "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" (Kor. *Wŏnhyo pulgi.* Iryŏn, *T* 49.2039.1006a) tells us, Wŏnhyo has been portrayed as a figure who reconciles all the dichotomies in life including often-polarized concepts of the secular with the sacred, the monastic with the lay life. The scope of his unbridled nature encompasses realms that, to normal people, could mean a violation of monastic precepts or ethical codes including fathering a child as a Buddhist monk. However, Wŏnhyo was not the first transgressor in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition: a perennial exemplar is Vimalakīrti, whose transgression of precepts was inscribed in the text and interpreted in the Mahāyāna tradition as an instance of overcoming of precepts—hence the Mahāyānist logic that transgression is non-transgression.

When this oxymoron of overcoming precepts by transgression is pushed further, one encounters what is known as "mad monks" (or "hippie monks") in the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Wŏnhyo, no doubt, has been a representative figure in the category of the "mad monks" in Korean Buddhism (Faure, 1995). Like the history of madness explored by Foucault, the "madness" claim of these monks in East Asian Buddhism contains double edges: on the one hand, they are mad "monks," who challenge and transgress institutional authority, be they monastic confinements, religious precepts, or social norms. On the other, they are "mad" monks, who remain beyond the logic of "normal" people. Hence stigmatism, or at least a conflicting evaluation of their behaviors, seems in order. One hermeneutic device to suppress the latter (the stigma of being abnormal) and elevate the former (interpreting transgression as a higher form of realizing Buddhist teaching of non-obstruction among things) is a genesis of hagiography.

Hagiographical tradition in East Asian Buddhism has been understood as a medium to promote Buddhism in its naturalization process in China. The same might be applied to the case of Wŏnhyo. In a hagiography, events in one's biography become heavily charged with religious and philosophical meaning; a hagiography creates out of one's life a spiritual sampler: that is, "a model of conduct, morality, and religious understanding for the entire community" (Buswell, 1995, 86). Applying this idea to Wŏnhyo's life as described in "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled," one might ponder the nature of the moral and spiritual model Wŏnhyo's life was expected to offer to the Buddhist community in particular and the ethical discourse in general, given his overly "unbridled" and "unhindered" lifestyle. (For a detailed discussion on Wŏnhyo's biography, see Buswell, 1995). In other words, what is the function of the transgression-narrative in the construction of a religious and ethical paragon in Mahāyāna Buddhism?

In order to consider this issue, let us look at "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" as recorded in the *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, c.* 1285), a text that has been considered as one of major sources of Wŏnhyo's biography. Curiously enough, however, "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" does not mention much about how and when he joined a monastery, nor does it offer any information about his training as a Buddhist monk (for the problems in Wŏnhyo's biography, see Kwŏn, 1996 and Nam, 1995, 166–74). Instead, after introducing supernatural environments related to his birth, "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" describes several episodes in his life that can be categorized into the following three themes: first, Wŏnhyo's love affair with Princess Yosŏk, which led to the birth of their son, Sŏlch'ong, and subsequent disrobing of Wŏnhyo; second, his proselytizing activities to the socially marginalized group and his rejection of textual study in preference of actual performance of bodhisattva activities; third, his son Sŏlch'ong's prominent scholarship and filial piety after Wŏnhyo's death. This is rather a bizarre set of episodes for a biography of an eminent Buddhist monk. More interestingly, contemporary Korean Buddhist scholarship has frequently made recourse to this story and claimed that Wŏnhyo's life represents his thought. One cannot but ponder the logic behind such a hermeneutic endeavor. In this context, the section in "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" that describes the first and second themes above—the love affair and his proselytizing activites—could be especially disturbing to some readers, while carrying its own charm for others. Let us read the section and see how we might interpret it in the context of Buddhist ethics.

> Wŏnhyo failed to preserve precepts and fathered Sŏlch'ong. After that, he changed into a commoner's clothes [thereby disrobing], and called himself "lay practitioner Sosŏng." He came across a big gourd that a jester might have used: its shape was bizarre and strange. Wŏnhyo used the strange shape to create his own tool, naming it "unobstruction" (Kor. *muae*), reflecting the passage in the *Huayan jing (Flower Garland Scripture)* which states, "The person with no hindrance at all overcomes life and death at one single path." He also composed a song based on this and spread it throughout the land. Carrying the gourd, he traveled to thousands of villages and ten thousands of hamlets, singing and dancing, proselytizing with songs. Thanks to him, even the poor and uneducated were able to recognize the name the Buddha and recite the expression "namu" (homage). Wŏnhyo's proselytizing was great indeed!
>
> (Iryŏn: *T* 49.2039.1006b)[1]

This is probably one of the most frequently cited passages of Wŏnhyo's life. That said, what kind of ethical and spiritual archetype does the text attempt to establish here? In the passage, Wŏnhyo's violation of precepts was followed by disrobing, but endorsed as a bodhisattvic action of "unhindrance" supported by the textual authority of the *Huayan jing*. Recorded several lines later, his unhindered activities superseded textual authority as Wŏnhyo gave up his commentary writings on the *Huayan jing* when he reached the fascicle on "Siphoehyang" (Ch. *Shi huixiang,* "Ten Transferences [of Merits]"), which teaches how bodhisattvas transfer or dedicate their merits to sentient beings. Presumably, Wŏnhyo wanted to literally act out the "transference of merits" instead of writing a commentary on them. It seems a logical development that, to Wŏnhyo, bodhisattvic activities should have a priority over a textual discourse on bodhisattvas. However, this type of interpretation of Wŏnhyo's life raises a series of questions which have not received due attention, only two of which include: (1) Is transgression of precepts an inevitable stage to realize bodhisattva spirit and the realization of the Buddhist vision of the unobstructed interpenetration (harmony) of all beings? (2) If so, does the vision realized through this transgression necessarily reveal harmony among things in the world as has been interpreted so far?[2] A voice claiming an opposite to this transgression-harmony paradigm has also been raised. This claim questions the relationship between Wŏnhyo's life of transgression and his scholarly writings, and contends that Wŏnhyo's life contradicts his own views on bodhisattva ethics as exposed in his works on bodhisattva precepts. In fact, Wŏnhyo composed commentaries on bodhisattva ethics, and three of them are extant. In addition, in a short piece entitled, *"Palsim suhaeng jang"* ("Arouse your mind and practice"), Wŏnhyo wholeheartedly emphasizes the importance of leading a monastic life and observing precepts. In that essay, Wŏnhyo advises practitioners to stay away from the secular life, as he states: "Although talented and wise, if a person dwells in the village, all the Buddhas feel pity and sadness for him. Though a person does not practice the path, if he dwells in a mountain hut, all the saints are happy with him" [Wŏnhyo, (a): *HPC* 1.841a–b; English translation, Lee, 1993, 155]. In the same essay, Wŏnhyo stresses the importance of precepts in Buddhist practice:

> The precepts are the skillful ladder for leaving behind the clamor of this world and climbing into the empty sky. Therefore, one who wishes to become a field of merit for others while breaking the precepts is like a bird with broken wings which tries to fly into the sky while bearing a tortoise on its back. A person who is not yet liberated from his own transgressions cannot redeem the transgression of others. But how could one not cultivating the precepts and still accept others' offerings?
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (a): *HPC* 1.841b; English translation, Lee, 1993, 156]

How do we reconcile the seeming contradiction between Wŏnhyo's moral teaching in these passages and his life of transgression?

In order to consider this question and those we posed earlier on the meaning of transgression and its relation to the vision of harmony, I shall examine Wŏnhyo's views on Buddhist precepts and bodhisattvic activities as they appeared in his three works on bodhisattva precepts: *Posal yŏngnak ponŏpkyŏng so (Commentary on the Sūtra of bead ornaments of bodhisattva' s primary activities;* hereafter *Commentary on bodhisattva activities), Pŏmmanggyŏng posal kyebon* *sa'gi* (*Personal records on the chapter on the bodhisattva precepts in the Sūtra of Brahma's Net;* hereafter *Personal records on the bodhisattva precepts*), and *Posal gyebon chibŏm yogi* (*Essentials of observation and violation of bodhisattva precepts;* hereafter *Essentials on observation and violation*).

2 Precepts, the law, and institutional authority

2.1 The precepts

Wŏnhyo opens his preface to the *Commentary on bodhisattva activities* with the following passage:

> What is known as the Two-levels of Truth and the Middle Path do not have a ferry point which can be [used as] a path. The gate of profound dharma also does not have a principle that can be [used as] a gate. Since there is no path, there is no way [based on which] to practice one's mind. Since there is no gate, there is nowhere to enter by practicing. However, even though the ocean itself does not have a ferry, people get through it with a boat and an oar; also even though the sky does not have a ladder, [birds] spread wings and fly high above. Therefore learn that pathless path means that anything can be a path; gateless gate indicates that anything can be a gate. Since there is nothing which is not a gate, each and every thing can make itself a gate to lead to subtlety. Since there is nothing which is not a path, each and every place becomes the path that leads [one] back to the origin.
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (c): *HPC* 1.498a]

In this passage, one can find a basic direction of Wŏnhyo's view on bodhisattva precepts, which can be summarized in the following two ways. The first is his claim that any

normative measures are temporary in nature. Thus Wŏnhyo argues that from the perspective of the Two Levels of Truth, the middle path, or the Buddha-dharma, there cannot be any set path which one can use as a guide, because what we consider as paths or gates are only temporary measures to lead one to the world of Buddha-dharma. From the beginning, thus, Wŏnhyo denies any essential or intrinsic nature related to normative rules. This is a telling opening remark in a work whose purpose lies in elaborating bodhisattva precepts. From this first claim, Wŏnhyo leads us to his second thesis: there are no set rules in an ultimate sense. This, in turn, indicates that any measures can function as a path leading one to the ultimate destination. The relationship between the particular and the universal expressed here is obviously Huayanistic. The universality, as indicated in the "subtlety" and "the origin," is related to each and every thing that exists; no specific qualifications are needed for any particularity to be in a special position to function as a liaison to help an individual reach this universality. The logic is oxymoronic: none is X means that anything and everything can be X.

The relationship between the particular and the universal in this context also appears at the beginning of the *Personal records on the bodhisattva precepts*. Wŏnhyo begins this text with his interpretation of the title of the *Sūtra*, that is, the Brahma's net. He explains that the "net" in the title "symbolizes the dharma taught by the Buddha" [Wŏnhyo, (b): *HPC* 1.596a]. Parsing it three ways, Wŏnhyo shows how different aspects of the world are encompassed in the teaching of the Buddha. In the first explanation, he states that different dharmas in the world, though different on the phenomenal level, are the same at the ultimate level of the Buddha's teaching. In his second explanation, this difference and sameness are also compared with the relationship between the net and the knots in the Brahma's net. Wŏnhyo writes:

> The second [aspect of the net as a symbol of the Buddha's teaching] refers to the teaching of the Provisional Truth [in the Two Levels of Truth]. This entity is different from that entity and that entity is different from this entity. Hence there exist ten thousand different things in the world. What this indicates is that this knot in the net is different from that knot and that knot is different from this knot [in the net]. At the same time, since the oneness of the absolute nothing is the Ultimate Truth [in the Two Levels of Truth], and although the differences in the Provisional Truth cannot be ignored, the Ultimate Truth encompasses the Provisional Truth, and thus there is one dharma which is the same through and through. This is like the net encompassing all the knots in the net. No knot exists beyond the net.
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (d): *HPC* 1.586b]

The relationship between the particular and the universal that Wŏnhyo describes here has the following two characteristics. First, it is non-hierarchical. Like the image of the horizontally spread net, there are only differences without discrimination. Second, in this paradigm, the universal and the particular are mutually encompassing; that is, the individual entities (the particularities) are not separable from the entirety (the net). Each knot, or entity, is not the same as the entire net, but is not different from it either. The passage, then, reiterates the relation of the subtlety and the path leading to it in the

Commentary on bodhisattva activities. Since none of the knots in the net is in a privileged position to represent the entire net, there cannot be a specific path that leads one to the "origin." That can also be interpreted to mean that any knot in the net can represent the entire net. We can expand this discussion on the particularities and the universal in these passages into the realm of ethical discourse, and we find ourselves in a rather problematic situation. If each and every thing can serve as a path, what exactly is the nature of this ethical norm and how does one know which path to take? If both good and evil can lead one to the ultimate destination, how does one draw an ethical value of either good or evil? In Wŏnhyo's paradigm, neither good nor evil can have the privileged position of leading one to the ultimate destination. This leads us to yet another question: if there was no one particular path to begin with, how can we legitimize a certain ethical code? To put it differently: from where does the authority of a certain path come? Does this amount to a wholesale negation of ethical categories, including the existence of precepts?

In *Essentials of observation and violation* (for discussions on the *Essentials,* see An, 1985; Kwŏn, 1989) Wŏnhyo writes:

> The bodhisattva precepts are a great ferry which turns the currents around and sends them back to their origin. They are the essential gates in rejecting the wrong and accomplishing the right. Characteristics [Kor. *sang;* Ch. *xiang*] of the right and wrong might be easy to distinguish; however to tell the nature [Kor. *sŏng;* Ch. *xing*] of good reward from that of bad is not. For example, a seriously wicked intention can take the appearance of rightness. Or a contaminated appearance and lifestyle can also contain genuine purity at its inner core. Or a work which seems to be bringing at least a small amount of good luck might turn out to have caused a great tragedy. Or someone whose thoughts and activities seem profound might turn out to violate simple and minor things.
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (d): *HPC* 1.581a]

The problem Wŏnhyo identifies here might resemble on its surface level the conflicting ethical claim between deontology and consequentialism. In deontological ethics, moral rules are considered to exist independently, and adherence to them is the basis of one's moral duties. Good is good as it is, and thus should be a standard of one's ethical action regardless of the situation. A consequentialist would assess the ethical value of conduct based on the results of each action. In the passage from Wŏnhyo above, his focus is on the gap between appearance and reality, inside and outside, expectation and actual result, and therefore seems to endorse the consequentialist position. But what Wŏnhyo tries to elucidate is neither deontological nor consequentialist, but *non-substantialistic,* which one can contend to be one of the most salient points of Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics, and which he describes quite clearly in the later part of *Essentials of observation and violation*. In this text, Wŏnhyo discusses the observation and violation of bodhisattva precepts in three stages: the first is the gate of lightness and seriousness of violations; the second is the gate of the shallow and deep of observation and violation of precepts, and the third is the gate of "the ultimate observation and violation" of bodhisattva precepts (Kor. *ku'gyŏngchibŏm*). In the third section, Wŏnhyo writes:

> With regard to committing or not committing a violation, if one does not transcend the two extremes [of being and non-being] one will not be able to ultimately observe precepts and thus does not violate them. Nor will the person be able to obtain the perfection of pure precepts. Why is it so? Precepts themselves do not have self-nature. Since they exist depending on various conditional causes [Kor. *yŏn*], they can never have their own independent features. Since conditional causes are not precepts, if separated from them, the precepts do not exist. [Try to] remove conditional causes one after another, and [note that] nothing can exist in the halfway [between conditional causes and precepts as entities]. If one tries to find precepts in this manner [by removing conditional causes in search for a precept as an independent entity], one will realize that precepts themselves can never be found.
>
> [Wŏnhyo (d): *HPC* 1.585a]

The passage unmistakably applies the Buddhist concepts of dependent co-arising and emptiness to the idea of precepts. The issue was especially important to Wŏnhyo, since in all three of his commentaries on bodhisattva precepts, he strove to clarify the Mahāyānist position on monastic life and precepts in contrast to the Hīnayāna position.

As is usually the case in Mahāyāna discourse, irony and paradox prevail in this passage. In order to observe precepts, one should realize that precepts are not real. Like Zen Buddhism, which urges practitioners to practice while constantly reminding them that there is nothing to practice (Kor. *musujisu*), Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna ethics demands that the observation of precepts in its ultimate sense amounts to the awareness that there is nothing to abide by. If there is nothing to abide by, what are the precepts for? Why do Mahayanists have precepts to begin with? The logic echoes the relationship between the particularities and the universal in the *Commentary on bodhisattva activities* or that of the knots and the net in the *Personal records on the bodhisattva precepts*. Precepts do not exist but at the same time are as real as every thing in the world. Thus Wŏnhyo continues:

> That precepts exist only based on multilevel conditional causes does not negate their existence in reality. Violating precepts is also like this; so is personal identity. In dealing with precepts, if one sees only their nonexistent aspect and says that they do not exist, *such a person might not violate precepts but will forever lose them,* because s/he denies their existence. Also, if someone relies on the idea that precepts do exist and thinks only on the existent side of precepts, even though s/he might be able to observe the precepts, *observation in this case is the same as violation,* because such a person negates the ultimate reality of precepts.
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (d): *HPC* 1.585a, emphasis mine]

This passage articulates the core of Wŏnhyo's position on bodhisattva precepts and hence his Mahāyāna ethics. The ultimate unreality of precepts explained in this passage brings in a different mode to our ethical discourse. Wŏnhyo's position on bodhisattva precepts in the passages cited so far can be summarized as following three aspects: first, precepts are non-real, because they are constructed by various conditions, and do not exist through

their intrinsic essence; second, the non-substantiality of precepts, however, does not negate their existence; third, if the practitioner becomes attached to the idea of observations (second aspect) and fails to practice its non-reality (first aspect), then observing precepts will ironically turn out to be its violation. The third thesis gives us some clue for reflecting on the meaning of Wŏnhyo's life of transgression. But here let us revisit the questions posed at the end of the previous section; that is, whether transgression of precepts is inevitably related to a full realization of the ultimate teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and whether the vision revealed through this transgression necessarily implies harmony.

Wŏnhyo's rather sophisticated interpretation of the meaning of precepts in his Mahāyāna Buddhism links his thought to a broader context of non-substantialist mode of thinking and its position on ethics. The problem of ethics related to the non-substantialist nature of Buddhist philosophy has raised concern among some contemporary Western scholars of Buddhism. In this context, some wonder whether ethics is possible within the frame of Mahāyāna Buddhism in general, given that the non-substantialist stance of Mahāyāna Buddhism undermines any attempt to set up ethical norms. This, however, is not a problem related exclusively to Buddhist thought but more broadly to the mode of thinking identified here as the non-substantialist. The substantialist mode of thinking assumes an existence of essence or substance as the foundation of beings—and with its extension, the intrinsic nature of entity as a ground for ethical norms. In the *non-substantialist* mode of thinking, however, the world is understood as being based on a differential notion instead of identity. From this perspective, the transcendental signifier, which has served as the origin, or the beginning point for the substantialist philosophy, cannot be identified, unless the chain of differential connections is intentionally and forcefully interrupted. In Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, this differential notion of being is explained through the simile of the Brahma's net, where thousands of knots exist through their conditionality. Since this conditionality is what constitutes an entity—as Wŏnhyo explains in the case of each precept that exists through conditions—identity is *non-identity*. When this idea is applied to precepts, Wŏnhyo comes to the view that precepts *per se* do not exist as independent entities and, like other entities, are products of aggregations of conditions. Not only do ethical categories become problematic in this case, because the creation of norms from a non-substantialist position cannot be so distinctively manifested as in a normative ethics of the substantialist philosophy, but also preserving ethics itself is understood as containing a potential danger of producing an opposite result: that is, mere observation is violation in the sense that by abiding by ethical codes and precepts, one reifies and substantializes that which is basically non-substantial. For example, suppose there is a precept A. Having taken a vow to observe precepts, a practitioner is bound to follow the precept. And our common-sense moral consciousness will surely agree that by observing the precept A, the practitioner does accomplish her/his duty. Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna ethics does not stop here. To observe the precept A is only one aspect of observing precepts. If the practitioner observes the precept A with the idea that the rule A actually exists as an independent entity, and fails to consider that the rule A is a provisional designation from the perspective of ultimate reality, the practitioner violates the precept by observing it, because he/she comes to reify the precept A by observing it, when the precept A is empty in its ultimate sense, like any other entity in the world. The problem generated by Wŏnhyo's Buddhism and non-

substantialist mode of thinking in regard to ethics is, then, a fundamental one: ethics itself can be unethical.

The issue needs further elaboration. To do this I shall consider a similar problem associated with the twentieth-century continental philosophy, loosely grouped as postmodern thought. What I have in mind is Derridean deconstruction, which I find relevant to our discussion on Wŏnhyo's non-substantialist ethics and the issue of transgression. Before we move on to Derridean ethical paradigm, let us at least state this: the idea that being ethical itself contains the potential of being unethical does not necessarily negate a possibility of ethics, as some might want to argue. Instead, the non-substantialist ethics demands a fundamental change in our ethical mode of thinking, and further a radical reconceptualization of the genre "ethics" itself.

2.2 The law

Derridean deconstruction begins by marking the limits of the European continental metaphysical tradition. Derrida identifies the tradition as "metaphysics of presence," in which presencing of the ultimate Truth as logos constitutes the ground of being and signification. When the principle of identity is the foundational logic of existence and philosophy, identity is understood as presencing of essence and substance. Derrida claims that such a presence of entity as a coherent and intrinsic essence is not possible unless the philosopher's desire creates it through an intentional interruption of the movements of *différance*. *Différance* is a Derridean term for the devoid-ness of the self-nature of a being, when identity is understood as non-identity. Derrida contends that identity is always already non-identity, because it exists in the midst of others. Hence, to Derrida, in the concept of the self, others are already there. Whereas Wŏnhyo explains the reality of precepts as well as an entity in the world as accumulation of conditionality, Derrida understands identity through its differential notion. The differential notion is explained in his early works through *différance* and trace (Derrida, 1974b; see also Park, 2006b). In his later works, Derrida frequently interchanged these expressions with the "to-come," "context," and "secrets," among others (Derrida, 1990/2002, 1997c/2001, 2001; Derrida and Ferraris, 1997/2001). Through these expressions, Derrida attempts to reveal the world and being that always already exist in the context of "inexhaustibility." An entity does not exist through or with its essence, the what-ness, or a *quale;* it is always already in the context. Existence itself *is* context and the context is never coherent or systematic, because there is always a "to-come." This to-come-ness of context makes one a stranger to oneself, for there is always the other who is to come and, thus, becomes "me" and who is "me." Again, like the conditionality in Wŏnhyo, the to-come-ness of one's existence in Derrida makes it impossible to construct a closed identity of an entity. Since one's identity is dependent on others—the other to come and the future to come—and is not reducible to any single definition, an entity is characterized by its openness.

This openness (which is also *différance* and trace) of an entity and of a text (which is also context) has been criticized by some for its inability to make any contribution to ethical discourse. Ethical discourse, from the normative ethical perspective, begins by making distinctions. Categorical classification and subsequent value judgments of each category are starting points for there to be any form of norms. The challenges Derridean deconstruction faces in the realm of ethics, then, are similar in nature to the challenges in

Wŏnhyo's Buddhism. Both Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna Buddhism and Derrida's deconstruction, with their understanding of the nature of identity as conditional and differential, undermine the two fundamental constituents of normative ethics: categorization and institutionalization. The complexity of the ethical position of Wŏnhyo and Derrida lies in that their awareness of the fundamental problem of categorization and institutionalization cannot and does not lead them to a simple negation of normative ethics.

Things exist through accumulation of provisional conditions or provisionally assigned categories. For example, there was wood, there was a tree, there was chopped wood, there was a carpenter, and here is a chair. A chair at a given moment is a result of the accumulation of all of these (and much more), which at other times belonged to different genres/categories, and which will at a certain point in the future belong to yet another category, be it ashes, smoke, and so on. In other words, provisional categorization is not an optional element in life, but existence itself. Both Wŏnhyo and Derrida are fully aware of this aspect of identity, and neither of them denies the genrefication itself. In other words, Wŏnhyo would not say that a tree, a chair, or space does not exist. By the same token, he did not say that good or evil did not exist, or that precepts did not exist. As he said in the already quoted passage, to consider the attributes (characteristics) of right or wrong is possible, but to consider the nature of good or bad reward is more complex. To define right or wrong belongs to a theoretical stage, which one could say as one-dimensional; on the other hand, to consider its reward means considering the combination of *all* the provisional categories involved in an action. For example, to say, "killing is wrong" is a simple statement. Here one can create a category of right and wrong. However, if we situate this one-dimensional definition of an ethical category in a context where various different provisional categories collide, we find that an ultimate ethical evaluation of an action is not possible without the process of simplification of the context, which includes the process of inclusion and exclusion, suppression and foregrounding. One needs to domesticate the situation in order to obtain the ethical status of an action, and such simplification and domestication inevitably brings in the issue of authority: "Who" has the right to domesticate and to trim off the inexhaustible context of the action under evaluation at a given moment? These, then, involve two different levels: categorization and institutionalization of created categories. Institutionalization substantializes and reifies provisional categories. Ethical norms are the institutionalization of ethical categories, and precepts are an institutionalization of an ethical code of behaviors in a monastic institution.

Categorization is itself part of institutionalization, for without instituting the categories in our language and thought system, a category cannot function. The difference between the two, however, can be explained by the three stages through which Wŏnhyo discusses the observation and violation of bodhisattva precepts in the *Essentials on observation and violation,* as briefly mentioned earlier. To reiterate, at the first level, Wŏnhyo distinguishes minor offences from serious ones with regard to monastic precepts; then, differences between shallow and deep levels of violation are discussed; and in the final stage, he elaborates the problem of categorization and institutionalization of precepts and ethical category, understanding and practice of which he proposes as the ultimate level of observing (or violating in the sense) of precepts. In the first two stages Wŏnhyo explains bodhisattva precepts from the perspective of inevitable existence of categorizations

whereas, in the third stage, he approaches bodhisattva precepts from the perspective of non-existence of ultimate categorization. But what exactly is the relationship between the provisional level in which precepts exist—and ethical categories also function as distinctive categories—and the ultimate level in which their non-existence should be realized? Imagining a lineal movement from the provisional to the ultimate could be the simplest solution: when one understands the relationship in such a dualistic logic, one might claim that Wŏnhyo's transgression—that of violating precepts in his life—is an acting out of his unobstructed behavior performed at the ultimate level, which should be distinguished from *actual* violation of precepts by those who are still at the provisional level.

An extension of this romantic view of the Mahāyāna position on categorization and institutionalization is what leads some contemporary scholars to skepticism regarding the possibility of ethics in Mahāyāna Buddhism. What Wŏnhyo proposes here, however, is more complex than this, and we shall consider the issue together with Derrida's position on institutionalization, which he explores in the context of the institutionalization known as the "law" and "justice" in his essay entitled, "Force of law: the 'mystical foundation of authority'."

At the beginning of his essay, Derrida ponders the meaning of the English expression, "to enforce the law," and asks: if law is something that needs to be enforced, how is the force that is required to exercise law different from the use of the force that one commonly connects with violence? In other words, what makes one commonly hold the view that the kind of force in the law is different from the kind of force related to violence? One way of answering this question is to resort to the authority law embodies, which violence does not have. If so, that is, if law itself contains the power to justify its use of force distinguished from violence, where does this authority of law come from?

Let us reiterate the question: how is the force of law different from the force of violence? The question leads us to several sub-questions: (1) If the force of law is different from the force in the use of violence, where does the authority and power of the law come from? (2) If the force of law is as violent as the force of violence, does that say that law is violence? (3) If law is violence, does it negate the legitimacy of the law? (4) If the force of law is violence—as in the case of the force of violence—and still the law is legitimate, what is the nature of justice and ethics that is proposed in this paradigm?

The series of questions posed here regarding the relationship between the law, justice, violence, and authority is as relevant to the understanding of Wŏnhyo's position on bodhisattva precepts as it is to Derrida's deconstruction of law and justice. By simply replacing "law" in the above questions with "precepts," one finds the similar nature of the issue in Wŏnhyo and Derrida.

The question of whether the force of law can also be considered violence is a provocative one and could even be seen as seditious, because the idea threatens the commonly held oppositional position between law and violence. The use of force that results in violence is also commonly defined as "illegal" as opposed to the legal "force of law," which protects one from such illegal use of force. If the commonsense logic distinguishing the law and violence is to be tenable, however, some factors need be identified to distinguish two forms of force—the force of law and the force of violence—*other than* the former being considered legal and the latter illegal. That is so because the fact that something is considered legal in a community does not attribute to that

something an intrinsic authority. As we shall see shortly, the fact that something is violent does not necessarily make that violent force illegitimate or illegal, either. It is in this context that Derrida quotes from Pascal, who cites Montaigne without identifying the author:

> one man says that the essence of justice is the authority of the legislator, another that it is the convenience of the king, another that it is current custom; and the latter is closest to the truth: simple reason tells us that nothing is just in itself; everything crumbles with time. Custom is the sole basis for equity, for the simple reason that it is received; it is the mystical foundation of its authority. Whoever traces it to its source annihilates it.
>
> (*Pensée* 293, quoted in Derrida, 1992a, 12)

Immediately after this citation from the *Pensées,* Derrida adds Montaigne's passage: "And so laws keep up their good standing, not because they are just, but because they are laws: that is the mystical foundation of their authority, they have no other…. Anyone who obeys them because they are just is not obeying them the way he ought to" *(ibid.)*. Even though Derrida borrowed the expression "mystical foundation of authority" from Montaigne, the meaning of this expression, in the way Derrida interprets it in his discussion of law and justice, is not clear at all in either Pascal's or Montaigne's passages. That is especially so because, in Derrida's view, the "mystical foundation of authority" does not simply imply the visible and intentional "abuse" of the force of law by those who have the power that one commonly associates with dictatorship. As Derrida notes, nor does "mystical foundation" of institutional authority relate itself to any kind of moral cynicism. Instead, it goes beyond a simple "conventionalist or utilitarian relativism, beyond a nihilism, old or new, that would make the law a 'masked power'" (*ibid.,* 13). That is the case because what is revealed through this idea of "mystical foundation" of authority is the "interpretative force" that emerges at the moment of the initiation of law and stays with it thereafter, so that law can function as a regulatory power. In this sense, like categorization itself, the "mystical foundation" of law is not an optional element in our exercise and maintenance of law: it is the law itself. Derrida thus states:

> The very emergence of justice and law, the founding and justifying moment that institutes law implies a performative force, which is always an interpretative force… Its very moment of foundation or institution…, the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law *(droit),* making law, would consist of a *coup de force,* of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contradict or invalidate.
>
> (Derrida, 1992a, 13)

Locating the source of the legal authority in the interpretative force, and hence understanding it as inherently violent, is a natural consequence of a deconstructive mode of thinking. Derrida negates any possibility of the transcendental signifier to ground the

legal authority, and in that sense, any authority. That is because foundation of an authoritative power cannot be generated, from a Derridean deconstructive perspective, without intentionally stopping the flow of meaning structure, which is based on a differential notion. Hence Derrida continues: “No justificatory discourse could or should insure the role of metalanguage in relation to the performativity of institutive language or to its dominant interpretation” *(ibid.)*. To Wŏnhyo, precepts exist as accumulation of conditionalities, and thus no metalanguage for precepts and ethical codes should exist. The non-existence of metalanguage for precepts does not negate the existence of precepts, nor its validity as a regulatory force for practitioners. A salient point, however, is that if the practitioner takes the provisional authority of precepts as if they were permanent, endorsement of the temporary authority of precepts will result in the dreadful state of violating precepts by observing them. In other words, whereas the temporary authority is not negated completely, it is always to be understood in connection with the non-existence of this authority in the ultimate level; hence provisionally of precepts should always remain on the horizon of the practitioner’s understanding and observation of them. This distinguishes Wŏnhyo’s ethical stance from any kind of *laissez-faire* anarchism of ethics or even from the naïveté of a transgression-harmony paradigm.

What Wŏnhyo might call the ultimate non-foundationalism of precepts is to Derrida the fundamental self-authorization of laws. Hence Derrida explains his more sophisticated way of dealing of violence as follows:

> Since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can’t by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground. Which is not to say that they are in themselves unjust, in the sense of “illegal.” They are neither legal nor illegal in their founding moment. They exceed the opposition between founded and unfounded, or between any foundationlism or anti-foundationalism.
>
> (Derrida, 1992a, 14)

Here Derrida unequivocally identifies law with violence. However, unlike the common view, in which violence is understood as illegal use of force, Derrida does not negate the legality of law while defining law as violence. The violence of law is not mere violence, but the “founding violence”: in other words, the birth of the law is the birth of violence; without violence, the law cannot be generated. The concept of violence needs elaboration here, since violence in this sense is not limited to physical force, which Derrida identifies as the third level of violence in his early work, *Of Grammatology*. Violence on its first level begins with articulation. Naming is the moment when classification and categorization begins; this cutting, dividing, and appropriating—and thus identifying—is “originary violence of language.” Arche-writing—introduced by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* as the original operation of a linguistic system in the signification process—is also arche-*violence,* for language is possible only through appropriation. The naming and separation are made possible by arche-writing and thus our signification process creates the second level of violence, which is “reparatory, protective, instituting the ‘moral’.” Out of this second violence emerges empirical violence, such as “what is commonly called evil, war, indiscretion, rape” (Derrida, 1967/1974b/1976, 112). Since

the originary violence begins with articulation, it is not possible to escape the force of violence: it is already there. Articulation takes place in the web of signification, and signification is a product of categorization, division, and reification. Without categorization, and without, to some degree, reifying each defined category, signification cannot take place. Violence, then, is not a result of signification, but signification itself. The same can be said about law. Like the "originary violence of language," which makes signification possible, law and justice, that is, the practice of law (or the force of law), becomes possible through "the founding violence of law" because "Justice, as law, is never exercised without a decision that *cuts,* that divides" (Derrida, 1992a, 24, emphasis original).

This passage might remind one of the well-known *gong'an* (or encounter dialogue) in Chan Buddhist tradition, entitled "Nanquan cuts the cat in two" (*Wumenguan* #14; *T* 48.2005.294c). The physical violence involved in this *gong'an* reflects the violence involved in our meaning-giving act, which is understood as an act of ultimate decision-making. If we place side by side Derrida's view on violence, law, and justice with Wŏnhyo's view on precepts and the Brahma's net simile, we create a picture in which some elements are interestingly overlapping, and which, with some scrutiny, could be disturbing. Both bodhisattva precepts for the Buddhist community and laws in a nation-state are created in the process of institutionalization. Institutionalization becomes possible through appropriation and domestication, and, thus, reification of entities, which by nature to both Derrida and Wŏnhyo exist in terms of a differential notion, be it *différance* or conditionality. The violence is inevitable in institutionalization, which, however, amounts to the existence of the law or precepts. As much as the force of law is violence, so is the practice of precepts. Hence, as Wŏnhyo emphasizes, the observation of precepts contains the potential of turning out to be violation of them if the practitioner fails to see the fundamental violence involved in the act of creating them.

3 The ethical meaning of faith and the singularity of event

At this point, we are compelled to consider the fourth question raised earlier: what kind of ethical paradigm does Derrida propose in demonstrating that, with the law, violence begins, and at the same time that the force of law as violence does not negate the legitimacy of the law? Wŏnhyo made a similar claim: observation of precepts could be equal to violating them, but that does not negate the necessity of precepts themselves. What would be the ethical implication of Wŏnhyo's claim that observation of precepts without awareness of their provisional nature would result in the violation of precepts in its ultimate sense? In order to answer this question, we need to move to the next stage of Wŏnhyo's ethical discourse, which I define as "the stage of faith."

The role of faith in Wŏnhyo's bodhisattva ethics is most noticeable in his *Commentary on the bodhisattva activities,* which is his commentary on Mahāyāna Buddhist text entitled *Pusa yingluo benye jing* (Kor. *Posal yŏngnak ponŏpkyŏng; The Sūtra of bead ornaments of bodhisattva' s primary activities; T* 24.1485.1010b-1023a). The *Sūtra* is well known for its radical simplification of the process of giving/receiving bodhisattva precepts. In this *Sūtra,* all and any formalities related to precepts-receiving seem to have been dismissed. Here are only some examples of such simplifications in precepts-giving/

receiving in the *Sūtra*. With regard to the qualifications for the preceptgivers, the *Sūtra* states: “A husband and a wife or relatives can be teachers for each other and thus give precepts” (*T* 24.1485.1021c). In terms of the qualifications for the receivers of precepts, the *Sūtra* states that understanding language will be sufficient to qualify one to observe precepts, which amounts to saying that anybody can receive precepts. Also, the *Sūtra* claims that “the bodhisattva precepts can be received but cannot be lost; thus once one receives them, they won’t be lost until the end of the future” (*T* 24.1485.1021b). Interestingly, the *Sūtra’s* attempt to attract people to receive bodhisattva precepts by offering a radically simplified version is visibly contrasted with the rhetoric of threat, through which the *Sūtra* seems to doubly emphasize the importance of receiving precepts. For example, immediately before the *Sūtra* allures practitioners with the statement that, once received, the bodhisattva precepts cannot be lost even when violated, the *Sūtra* states that those who are yet to receive bodhisattva precepts cannot be called:

> a being with feeling and consciousness; such a person is not different from an animal; the person cannot be called a human being; the person is always separated from the sea of three treasures; the person is neither a bodhisattva, nor a man nor a woman nor a ghost, nor a human being; that being is an animal, has a wrong view, is a heretic and not even close to human feeling.
>
> (*T* 24.1485.1021b)

What are all these threats about and what is the motivation behind such a radical simplification of the procedure of giving/receiving the precept in this *Sūtra*? What lies between Wŏnhyo’s sophisticated Mahāyāna ethics and such a simplification of bodhisattva precepts?

Whatever the intention of the author of the *Sūtra* might be in simplifying the process of giving/receiving the precepts, Wŏnhyo does not seem to be attracted to the features for which this *Sūtra* is well known. Except for a brief explanation of the meaning of the retention of received precepts, Wŏnhyo keeps silence on all these issues in his commentary. He passes lines and lines of the *Sūtra* without much comment on the conditions and procedures of receiving precepts. The *Sūtra* moves on to describe that the gathered assembly of a hundred million people have all received precepts, practiced the Ten Precepts to satisfaction and thus entered “the state of initial stay.” With this, the section on receiving precepts closes and the *Sūtra* discusses the issue of “learning practicing.” As the *Sūtra* reaches this point, Wŏnhyo offers a brief introduction, and then brings the reader’s attention to the “Ten Faiths.” He writes: “Regarding the Ten Faiths, the *Huayan jing* states, ‘Bodhisattvas have ten kinds of indestructible faith. What are they? 1. indestructible faith in all the Buddhas; 2. indestructible faith in Buddhist teaching…” [Wŏnhyo (c): *HPC* 1.522a].[3] Wŏnhyo continues to list all ten bodhisattva faiths. Why did he need to enumerate all ten faiths after he had kept silence on the issues for which this *Sūtra* is best known?

It seems that, at this point, Wŏnhyo is confirming the *Sūtra’s* statement, “All the sentient beings take faith as their ground, when they first entered the sea of three jewels” (*T* 24.1485.1020b). Faith is the beginning of the internal movement of the practitioners, whereas all the rules and regulations of giving and receiving precepts, however simplified

they might be, are still one step removed from the practitioners themselves. Without internal initiation, one cannot take the first step toward the bodhisattva precepts. Faith is the individual's determination to be part of the ethical world called Mahāyāna bodhisattva. In faith-based ethics, ethical discourse begins internally with the individual's inner transformation, which always takes the form of singularity. It places itself opposite to the rule-based ethics in the sense that, in rule-based ethics, the initiation begins outside of ethical agency, which takes its authority from what each system claims to be universal. Faith is a singular event, in which ethical agency makes a positive and constructive determination to get involved with others, with the world as well as with oneself.

By enumerating each entry of the "Ten Faiths," Wŏnhyo emphasizes the importance of bodhisattvas' having "indestructible faith in" the Buddhas, Buddhist teaching, all sage-monks, all the bodhisattvas, all teachers, all sentient beings, and so on. But how does this idea of the practitioner's having faith in all these objects relate to Wŏnhyo's emphasis that even precepts do not exist at their ultimate level? How is this having "faith in" the objects of the practitioner's faith different from having a reified concept of these objects, and thus violating the idea of conditionality of these objects of one's faith? If we consider Wŏnhyo's view that bodhisattva precepts exist on a provisional level, but are empty on the ultimate level, the ten objects in which bodhisattva should have indestructible faith need to be understood in the same manner. That is, all the Buddhas in which bodhisattva should have indestructible faith exist at a provisional level but are empty at the ultimate level. If we follow this logic, we are led to question the very nature of "faith" in Wŏnhyo's Buddhist thought. What does the expression "to have faith in" mean in Wŏnhyo's Mahāyāna Buddhism, if the object of faith cannot be substantially defined?

We can answer these questions by saying that faith is another expression of the tension between the singularity of an event at the provisional level and its tie to the ultimate; in this case, "indestructible faith" itself is an oxymoronic expression, which is pregnant with the inevitable destructibility of that indestructible faith and therefore insecurity that the individual has to go through in order to maintain faith. Just as with provisional and ultimate levels of observing and violating precepts, here again we see that the destructible reality of faith-holding and the necessity to hold an indestructible faith are not in a lineal relationship of moving from the former to the latter with an assumption that one can reach a certain indestructible faith at the final stage of one's practice. Instead, to "have faith" is this tension itself. To put it another way, the ethical in the non-substantial mode of thinking begins with the recognition of the singularity of each event. Singularity is not the same as independence; nor does the recognition of singularity attribute a substantial essence to an individual entity or an event. Singularity, rather, denotes the irreducibility of the non-exhaustible conditionality that constitutes each moment of an event. Because each event takes place through the accumulation of different conditionalities, each event is unique. To acknowledge the singularity of each event is another way of marking the inevitable tie between the provisional and the ultimate reality. This tie, however, is to remain unstable, or in tension, instead of creating a determined realm of finality and security. Like Kierkegaard's Abraham, who has to have a faith in absurdity, to have faith in Wŏnhyo is to live the tension between the provisional and ultimate reality without ultimate resolution.[4]

Here we come to understand precepts whose meaning is different from mere regulative measures. Allow me to repeat the passage of Wŏnhyo cited earlier:

> In dealing with precepts, if one sees only their nonexistent aspect and says that they do not exist, *such a person might not violate precepts but will forever lose them,* because s/he denies their existence. Also, if someone relies on the idea that precepts do exist and thinks only on the existent side of precepts, even though s/he might be able to observe the precepts, *observation in this case is the same as violation,* because such a person negates the ultimate reality of precepts.
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (d): *HPC* 1. 585a, emphasis mine]

In order for the faith-holder to sustain "indestructible faith in" the objects of faith in the Ten Faiths, the tension between the institutionalized precept that tells practitioners of the "shoulds" and "should-nots" and the singularity of each incidence need to be maintained. Derrida calls this the very experience of *aporia,* which he defines as an inevitable stage in experiencing justice: "An aporia is a non-road. From this point of view, justice would be the experience that we are not able to experience" because experience by definition means "something that traverses and travels toward a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage." But Derrida confirms: "there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia" (Derrida, 1992a, 16). And this moment is the moment of madness—that of experiencing the impossibility of dividing being and non-being, existence and non-existence of precepts: "The instant of decision is a madness, says Kierkegaard. This is particularly true of the instant of the just decision that must rend time and defy dialectics. It is a madness" (*ibid.,* 26). This madness is perhaps a hyperbole of the "secrets" of existence that is always already in the middle of "to-come" without the possibility of a moment of seizure in which one "sees through" reality in a frozen state. This is the madness no institutionalization can fully appropriate but which, nevertheless, remains behind the institutionalization, like Julia Kristeva's chora in its relation to the semiotic. And this might well be what is behind the "mad-monk" paradigm of East Asian Buddhism in its own transformed way. Mad monks are mad, or abnormal in the sense that their deviation from normality reveals the inappropriate constraints of institutionalized life, institutionalized value, and institutionalized thinking. Their transgression marks the very limits of institution but without endorsing the transgression as an alternative to an institutionalized social system. Transgression of Wŏnhyo in this sense cannot and does not offer any harmonizing vision that can come about by simply negating the institutional authority, be it social or religious.

4 Transgression and the ethics of tension

The unobstructed interpenetration of the secular and the sacred in Wŏnhyo is the vision to be realized, instead of reality itself. If Wŏnhyo did "travel to thousands of villages and to ten thousands of hamlets, singing and dancing, proselityzing with songs" (as we read in "Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled" discussed earlier), his singing and dancing cannot be the Dionysian festive dance indulging in the affirmation of the world. Imagine an ex-Buddhist monk in tattered clothes in an unknown village dancing with a mask and singing:

> How many lives have you failed to practice, by passing your days and nights in vain? How much longer will this empty body survive for you not to practice this lifetime? This body will inevitably come to an end. Who knows what body you will have next time? Isn't this an urgent matter? Isn't this an urgent matter?
>
> [Wŏnhyo, (a): *HPC* 1.841c]

What we get from this picture is not that of a peaceful world in which the enlightened bodhisattva Wŏnhyo bridged the gap between the monastic and the lay or between the Buddhist ideal world of unobstruction and the sentient being's reality. Instead, we are forced to face the stark reality of human existence in which conflicts, gaps, and contradictions are too clear and obvious to be solved with any one simple discourse or one individual hero. And this reality is not something one can completely overcome by blindly observing bodhisattva precepts themselves. In this sense, transgression, and the madness paradigm—perhaps—was inevitable. And transgression here cannot denote a harmony, because transgression by definition indicates crossing borders, and crossing a border does not *break* the boundary; instead, it *confirms* it. If there is a reconciliation that can be accomplished and manifested through transgression, transgression will not remain transgression, but either becomes assimilation (through submission of one's identity to that which was supposed to be transgressed) or a revolution (by conquering the other). The transgression theme in Wŏnhyo's life, and more broadly, in East Asian Buddhist tradition, offers not a vision of harmony, but of an inevitable tension between the provisional and the ultimate reality. Tension in this case is also distinguished from conflict in the sense that whereas conflict is there to be resolved, tension in this case is not something that is moving toward a final resolution, but is reality of existence as it is, similar to Kierkegaard's paradox of existence. And this tension between the provisional and the ultimate reality, or that between the finite and the infinite, is the faith which Wŏnhyo reads as the beginning point of bodhisattva precepts. Awareness of such a tension is the groundless ground of one's ethical involvement with the world, in which normative ethical codes of a community are always understood against the background of their non-substantiality together with the founding violence involved in the established norms themselves. Derridean deconstruction understands it as a tension between the singularity of event and the universalist desire of human mind. This paradigm of transgression and the ethics of tension, however, should be understood without any romantic idealization of the outlaw, for such an idealization becomes possible as a result of substantializing the subversive force itself.[5]

Glossary

Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ 韓國佛教全書
Huayan jing 華嚴經
Huayan 華嚴
Hwaŏm 華嚴
ku'gyŏng chibŏm 究竟持犯
musujisu 無修之修

Palsim suhaeng jang 發心修行章
Pŏmmanggyŏng posalgyebon sagi 梵網經菩薩戒本私記
Posal yŏngnak ponŏpkyŏng so 菩薩瓔珞本業經疏
Posalgyebon chibŏm yogi 菩薩戒本持犯要記
Pusa yingluo benye jing 菩薩瓔珞本業經
Samguk yusa 三國遺事
sang 相
Shi huixiang 十迴向
Siphoeyang 十迴向
sŏng 性
Wŏnhyo pulgi 元曉不羈
Wŏnhyo 元曉
xiang 相
xing 性
yŏn 緣

Notes

1 Translation mine. Throughout this chapter, translations from classical Chinese are mine, unless noted otherwise. For an annotated translation of the entire “Wŏnhyo, the Unbridled” see Buswell, 1995, 110–26.

2 Such a life and hermeneutic of transgression can be found again in a modern figure, Zen Master Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu (1849–1912), who has been credited as the founder of modern Korean Sŏn/Zen Buddhism. Like Wŏnhyo, Kyŏnghŏ was known for his liberal sexual relationships; and like Wŏnhyo, Kyŏnghŏ’s violation of precepts has been interpreted by some as an act of “unobstructed-ness” of the enlightened mind whereas to others Kyŏnghŏ’s life presents conflicting images (see Park, 2006c).

3 The rest are: “3. indestructible faith in all sage-monks; 4. indestructible faith in all the bodhisattvas; 5. indestructible faith in all teachers; 6. indestructible faith in all sentient-being; 7. indestructible faith in bodhisattvas’ great wishes; 8. indestructible faith in all bodhisattvas’ activities; 9. indestructible faith in respectfully serving all Buddhas; 10. indestructible faith in the marvelous skillful means of all the bodhisattvas who help sentient beings transform themselves.”

4 This tension between the singularity and the universal is explained as a deconstructive ethical paradigm in Derrida’s discussion on hospitality (Derrida, 1997/2001) and on forgiveness (Derrida, 2001).

5 The editor of this volume, Youru Wang, raised an interesting question, in his review of the first draft of this chapter, whether my claim of the tension between the provisional and the ultimate levels challenges the basic position of East Asian Buddhism, which he considers to be the harmony between the provisional and the ultimate in the Two Levels of Truth. I much appreciate his thoughtful comments. My response would be as follows. The fact that East Asian Buddhism, especially early Chinese Buddhist thought, addresses the issue of harmony does not necessarily mean that we should take this discourse on harmony literally. One good example is Huayan Buddhism. Even though the signature of Huayan thought has been understood as the unobstructed interpenetration of phenomena (as a logical conclusion of Huayan vision of the fourfold worldview), this does not mean that harmony has been an unchallenged message of Huayan Buddhism. Instead, the discourse of harmony in Huayan Buddhism ironically reveals the tension between the phenomena and noumenon or among

the phenomena. By the same token, even though the foundational thought of Chan Buddhism is the identity between the Buddha and sentient beings, most of Chan discourse is devoted to demonstrating the tension between the two rather then their sameness. As mentioned in this chapter, tension is not the same as conflict. Conflict is there to be resolved, whereas tension, as I address it in this chapter, does not have a final resolution if tension is to function as tension. Tension in this sense is closely related to Derrida's concept of double-bind and can even be said to be the existential condition of human beings.

12
THE ETHICS OF ATTAINMENT
The meaning of the ethical in Dōgen and Derrida

Victor Forte

A concern for the meaning of the ethical has emerged out of the technological decadence of the twentieth century, and has been given philosophical legitimacy in continental thought, especially in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. There is, in this concern, a moving away from formal systems of ethics, and instead, a focusing on the very possibility of the ethical life, attempting to uncover the source or sources of this possibility. A comparative study of the meaning of the ethical has particular relevance for contemporary philosophy given the rise of Buddhist influence on Western notions of religious and existential purpose over the past 50 years. When one now considers the possibilities of the ethical life, it will often be the case that this question is experienced and understood through a confluence of these divergent sources of meaning, and so human possibility takes on an even more complex and multiple structure.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at one comparative question as a means to accessing both the ways in which the ethical has been traditionally understood, and the implications of this understanding for the meaning of the ethical life. The question is centered on the idea of attainment and how notions of attainment have influenced the understanding of the ethical in both Western and Buddhist thought. My comparison of Dōgen and Derrida is specifically concerned with how each responds to the question of attainment, and what we can learn from these responses about the meaning of the ethical. The comparison is useful if we begin with the premise that they have both inherited, through their respective traditions, a philosophical problem centered on the question of attainment, and, therefore, they have a commonality in being impelled to respond to this problem.

In foundational Western philosophy, Aristotle argues in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that his system of ethics will differ from Plato's in this specific sense —namely, that the ethical good as it is presented in the Platonic Idea is unattainable due to its transcendent structure, while his own ethics, by contrast, will be based upon an attainable good.[1] Because human beings have an ultimate purpose that is inherent in their nature, teleological fulfillment is recognized by Aristotle as the attainment of the good. Attainment is possible because the basis for the good is virtue, and virtue is immanent, inherent in human nature. The good is therefore attained in the manifestation of that nature through acting in accordance with it.

We find, then, in the foundational Western philosophical discussions of the meaning of the ethical, a bifurcated structure of transcendence and immanence. Where the Platonic understanding of the ethical produces a pessimism in the good being unattainable, the fallibility of Aristotle's view is in the possible emerging of a blind arrogance, seeing a universality in one's rational exercise of the virtues, and failing to recognize the socio-

historical horizons of one's ethical vision.[2] We are left, then, with an unsatisfactory understanding of the ethical since, in both the Platonic and the Aristotelian view, we can recognize an impediment to the practical application of ethical meaning.

The bifurcation found in these early Western notions of the ethical can also be found in the continued evolution of Western thought, especially within the European tensions that develop between traditional Christian and modernist visions of the ethical possibilities of humankind. The recognition in Christian doctrine that the fallen nature of human life impedes ethical self-reliance, and that the source of our ethical meaning is in the transcendent being of God, mirrors the pessimism of Plato. In Augustine's *City of God,* for example, we find a distrust in human systems of virtue, and a vision of attainment that can only occur in a transcendent place and time.[3] As in Plato, the hope of Augustine depends upon a hopelessness, his attainment upon the impossibility of attainment.

We can find the Aristotelian mode of ethical meaning in modernist systems of ethics, as we see, for example, in Kant, Mills, and Hobbes.[4] Although each of these thinkers created unique visions of ethical life, they all share with Aristotle two main foundational principles: first, that an ethical system must rely upon the rational powers of humankind to remain consistent and viable; and second, that such a system of ethics has a practical applicability to the social world, where the greatest good is achieved through following a rational design. However, they would also share with Aristotle a lack of recognition of the historical limitations of their own powers of reason, a limitation that was asserted in the critiques of modernism initiated by Nietzsche and then continued throughout the twentieth century.

Nietzsche is a pivotal figure for the concerns of this chapter because he can be understood as the first Western philosopher to recognize the bifurcation of ethical meaning we have been discussing, and because he revealed the inherent problems of both views. Nietzsche attacks both traditional Christianity and modernism, asserting that each results in an unacceptable nihilism. The Christian rejection of earthly life in favor of an idealized and transcendent afterlife is founded, according to Nietzsche, in an underlying resentment towards earthly competitive prowess. Waiting, as Augustine asks us to wait, for a world that is not of this world is, for Nietzsche, a rejection of human life itself. However, modernity, according to Nietzsche, does not respond effectively to humanity either.[5] Modernism freed us from the traditional authority of the Church, but in so doing, sent us adrift into a life of meaninglessness. The reduction of human life to the powers of reason (ignoring emotional and physiological factors), combined with a directionless lust for scientific development and progress, has only produced another form of human nihilism.

Nietzsche's own solution to this problem is not our main concern here, but only that he exposed the limitations of both inherited views and left the twentieth-century European world with the difficult task of responding. If Christian doctrine was mired in the nihilism of Platonic transcendence, and rationalist thought suffered from blind arrogance, confusing human progress with technological advancement, then philosophies concerned with the meaning of the ethical were faced with having to reveal its possibility without being resigned to either of these inherited views. It is in light of this particular philosophical challenge that we find, especially in French phenomenology, a response

worth examining. Our discussion of Jacques Derrida will therefore be focused upon this specific problem.

The question of attainment in Indian Buddhism

We need to begin our discussion of the ethical in foundational Buddhism by first clarifying how we can apply the meaning of the ethical to the early Buddhist teachings. We have stated in our discussion of the Western understanding of the ethical that its meaning has taken various forms, structured as transcendent or immanent depending upon how one understands the basis for human ethical life. In our discussion of Buddhism, however, we shall begin by arguing that the ethical is only given a single meaning, and this meaning would be *bodhi,* or enlightenment. If we consider how the ethical life is discussed in the Buddhist canon, essentially all ethical possibility comes from the cultivation of enlightenment. Whether one engages in Buddhist practice or not, all ethical intention arises from *bodhicitta,* the enlightened mind. One may argue, however, that the main purpose in the cultivation of *bodhi* is not ethics, but liberation. Our purpose here is not to refute this view, but to argue that even if the main goal of the cultivation of enlightenment is freedom, ethical possibility is also recognized in the Buddhist canon as resulting from this cultivation. Because the meaning of the ethical life is the main concern of this chapter, we are only attempting to examine this particular dimension of Buddhist practice.

We can see in early Indian Buddhism an argument against both transcendent and immanent notions of *being*. This was structured mainly as a critique of prevailing religious views originating from Brāhmanism and competing heterodox systems. The teachings of no-self *(anattā)* and dependent origination *(paticcasamuppāda),* for example, could be asserted to undermine the Brāhmanical claims of birth-based attainment of high caste identity. If one accepted these early Buddhist teachings, one could argue that Brahmin identity had no metaphysical basis and was therefore only the result of an imposed social convention. Jain-based purification practices were also rejected because they were founded on the idea of an immaterial soul *(jiva)* that needed to be released from the burden of bodily existence. So the self as either an immanent identity *(caste)* or a transcendent identity *(jiva)* were both rejected.

Although there is, in early Buddhism, a critical assessment of Brāhmanical claims of ethical immanence, the ethical claims of the early Buddhists, in the end, only repeated the fallacies of the Brāhmanical claims. Brahmin identity was replaced with *arahant* identity. Although the Brahmin was born with such an identity, the *arahant* was able to attain an ethical immanence through his/her repetition of Śākyamuni Buddha's enlightenment experience, resulting in the knowledge of the removal of the defilements *(āsravas)*.[6] We can interpret the emergence of the *Mahāyāna* movement within Indian Buddhism from an ethical perspective, as a critique of the *arahant's* claim for the ethical attainment of a Buddha, resulting in a rejection of ethical immanence. The *Mahāyāna* movement transcendentalizes final enlightenment, inserting a gap between the practicing cultivator of *bodhi* (the bodhisattva) and the final goal, the attainment of Buddhahood. Although attainment is promised, this attainment is given such a far-removed meaning from the lifetime of the practitioner that actual attainment is no longer the main purpose of the

practice; it is, rather, the *vow* to attain. A bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood knowing full well that exactly how and when this will occur is far beyond their own present-day awareness. They may assert that in some distant future they will indeed attain, based mainly upon the predictions of past Buddhas that they have reached the stage of non-regression. But what is attained is not attainment, but the promise of attainment, and the heroic perseverance of the bodhisattva, faced with the uncertainty of their religious path, is the primary meaning of their identity. This identity is mainly recognized as a "not yet"—a bodhisattva is a "not-yet-a-Buddha," the gap of non-attainment always leaving a continual opening for even higher and higher levels of *bodhi*. These heroic achievements of enlightenment are traditionally dramatized in exceptional, if not utterly fantastic, examples of ethical activity, recorded in inspirational texts such as the *Jātakas* and *Avadānas*.[7] The continual evolution of enlightened life in the innumerable lifetime career of a bodhisattva is understood as the achievement of an ever-greater capacity for ethical skill.

The bases for the bodhisattva practice are predominantly ethical and transcendent in structure, founded mainly in the *pāramitās* and the *brahmavihāras*. The *pāramitās* are literally "transcendences," all based in transcendent wisdom *(prajñāpāramitā),* a wisdom that "goes beyond." *Prajñā* wisdom is a transcendent wisdom in that it surpasses the worldly view of the ethical through a transcendence of the ordinary distinctions made between self and other. With transcendent wisdom comes transcendent giving, patience, effort, and morality, an ethical life that goes beyond ordinary giving, patience, etc. The *brahmavihāras* are, literally, "heavenly abodes," and include loving-kindness *(maitrī),* compassion *(karunā),* sympathetic joy *(muditā),* and equanimity *(upekshā)*. The teaching can be traced to foundational Buddhism, in the *Discourses (Nikāyas),* but it is also emphasized in the early *Mahāyāna* literature. Like the *pāramitās*, the *brahmavihāras* have a transcendent, ethical structure. The practitioner is essentially attempting to develop these virtues far beyond ordinary human development, to, in a sense, take up a transcendent abode on earth and treat others according to a heavenly standard.[8] Final release is avoided in order to continue the ongoing cultivation of the *brahmavihāras* and the *pāramitās*. We find this understanding of the bodhisattva practice, for example, in the early *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

> A Bodhisattva who is thus endowed with this thought of enlightenment and with skill in means does not midway realize the reality-limit. On the contrary, he does not lose his concentration on friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and impartiality [i.e. the *brahmavihāras*]. For, upheld by skill in means, he increases his pure dharmas more and more.
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> (Conze, 1973, 225)

The furthest reality limit is final release, or nirvana, so to continue concentration on the *brahmavihāras,* rather than realizing nirvana, is to increase the capacity for the transcendent abodes over many lifetimes. The ultimate goal then is not necessarily to attain a life in the transcendent heavens, but to live an earthly existence with ethical possibility that transcends ordinary ethical life.

The transcendent meaning of the ethical we find in the Indian *Mahāyāna* does not result in a hopelessness, as we found in foundational Western thought. Rather, there is

emphasis on encouragement, an assurance that attainment is achievable if one does not give in to the difficulties of the bodhisattva path, and can accept the uncertainty of how and when a final attainment will occur.[9] However, we do find what may be called an *anxiety* that develops from within the Indian tradition over the uncertainty of the bodhisattva path. One such development can be found, for example, in the emergence of the *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature) teaching.

The teaching of Buddha-nature, as we find in its earliest Indian expression, is understood as a germ or seed of Buddhahood residing in all beings.[10] Although the reasons for its origins are not clear, the Buddha-nature teaching did have the potential to reintroduce the notion of immanence, along with the ethical implications of such a view.[11] Dōgen inherited its importance from China, and had to contend with the notion of a Buddha-nature. How he responds to this inheritance will be the main focus of our discussion of Dōgen because of its centrality in the transcendence/immanence problem we have been following in Indian Buddhism. But let us first begin with Jacques Derrida's response to the meaning of the ethical and the transcendence/immanence problem we found in the Western canon. In subsequent sections of the chapter, we shall take up Dōgen's response to this problem in his own tradition, and then compare these responses, considering their ethical implications.

Ethical aspects of Derrida's philosophy

Faced with the great breath of Derrida's written work, we shall attempt to focus on the ethical implications of his philosophy and evaluate important essays on this subject, including "The violence of metaphysics," an essay from the collection entitled *Writing and Difference*, and from essays included in the collection entitled *The Gift of Death*. We begin by briefly considering the ethical dimensions of his linguistic theory.

Like Martin Heidegger and Friedrick Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida focused his philosophical efforts on uncovering the incongruence and inconsistencies of the Western philosophical canon. But unlike his predecessors,[12] he argues that the crux of these problems could be found in the assumption of decidability in linguistically structured truth claims. The finality of meaning suggested in philosophical assertions of truth invariably rests upon assumptions of presence, where an identifiable and singular truth somehow arises out of philosophical writings for all to witness. Truth claims are dependent, however, on a simultaneous marginalization or forgetfulness of other contradictory meanings that are nevertheless in relation with the preferred meaning. The marginalized *supplements* the preferred so that the supposed presence is, in actuality, left with traces of meaning that destabilize its centrality.[13] Derrida's project is to bring out into the light, *the other* of language, which has been left in the shadows of the *logocentric* schemas of presence. In this sense, he shares with Levinas the concern for ethical possibility, in that he provides us with the opportunity for hearing an otherwise muted voice. This possibility arises out of the "undecidability" of language in its differing/deferring functionality *(différance)*, because it allows for a space to open up within assertions of truth. The meaning of any truth claim is therefore never closed off or terminated in a hegemonic fashion, but always remains open for *the other* to emerge.

Here we shall address two ethical implications from Derrida's understanding of undecidability which are of particular interest to this study. First, in the ethical possibilities of undecidability there is the recognition of a "not yet." We stated earlier that we also found a "not yet" in the meaning of the bodhisattva path. As final enlightenment is deferred, allowing for the continual cultivation of ethical possibility, so the deconstructive deferring of final truth claims allows for the opening of *an other,* which provides the opportunity for new possibilities of meaning. We could say, therefore, that *différance* provides us with a kind of "not yet" and the *Mahāyāna* provides us with a kind of "not yet," both allowing for the possibility of ethical discovery. Second, this possibility offered by Derrida is based mainly upon a transcendence. In the undecidability of language as *différance,* within any truth claim there is the possibility of meaning that is not limited by that truth claim, but, in a sense, remains transcendent or free from it, *an other* that is not limited to, or imprisoned by, the linguistic formulation as it is presented. Yet *the other* remains embedded in the text, and is not metaphysically transcendent, somehow achieving its own presence beyond the text. Even in uncovering and revealing *the other* there is the continued functionality of *différance* and a deferring of final meaning. So there is a transcending activity in *différance,* allowing for ethical expansion, but it is a transcendence that does not depend upon any onto-theological underpinning.

Furthermore, the uncovering of *the other* in the text occurs through a reasoned examination, through a deconstructive analysis of the written material, so that the Aristotelian value for the powers of human rationality are not refuted here, yet the deferring of final meaning at the same time undermines the assertion of attainment. Immanence cannot be achieved in the "not yet" of *différance,* and the danger of arrogant blindness is avoided in the rejection of final decidability. In this way, Derrida responds to the challenge set forth by Nietzsche by avoiding both the modernist arrogance of attainment through reason and the Platonic hopelessness of transcendent metaphysics. To begin to further clarify Derrida's understanding of the meaning of the ethical, and the practical implications of this understanding, we shall now turn to the opening passages of his 1967 essay, "Violence and metaphysics."

Derrida begins this essay by considering what is understood as the history of philosophy, seen by many as a history that is ending, that philosophy is dying, that the very project of philosophy has been brought into question. But for Derrida, only because philosophy has been brought into question can we hope that "thought still has a future" (Derrida, 1978a, 79). The responsibility of the philosophers of today is to ask this question, to become a "community of the question," possibly in a way that is not even limited to philosophy. The responsibility presented to philosophers today is, in fact, "unbreachable" because if we consider what has happened in the history of philosophy thus far, we find, according to Derrida, that "the impossible has *already* occurred" (*ibid.,* 80). The impossible can be found in the canonical history of philosophical texts. These writings have essentially presented one totality after another, each a questioning of previous ones—each totality *an other* of previous totalities. But this is an impossibility. A totality by definition can have nothing outside of itself—a totality cannot have *an other*. So each philosophy presented as a totality (a *logos*), has had *an other,* unquestioned or overlooked by its author, but presented by subsequent philosophers. But the philosophers of today (at least those who embrace the continental movement) have such an "unbreachable responsibility" because unlike at any other time in the history of

philosophy we have become aware of this impossibility, and our questions must acknowledge this very awareness. Therefore our questions must, at the same time, become a protection of questioning, a recognition of the impossibility of presenting a totality. In this questioning, in the recognition of this impossibility, there is the possibility for ethical meaning.

> The liberty *of the question*…must be stated and protected. A founded dwelling, a realized tradition of the question remaining a question. If this commandment has an ethical meaning, it is not that it belongs to the *domain* of the ethical, but that it ultimately authorizes every ethical law in general.
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> (Derrida, 1978a, 80)

The ethical, therefore, to truly function as the ethical, cannot be approached within an understood domain (a totality), but rather, the ethical functions viably only when its meaning is left open, when it is freed from, and not limited to, a final meaning, to a domain or a *logos*. The ethical is, in this sense, to question the ethical. By avoiding a claim that "the ethical is X," there is a mirroring of Platonic transcendence, in that there is a certain wisdom recognized in refuting knowledge of the ethical as such, and in this very recognition there is the possibility of "authorizing every ethical law in general." That is, the basis for an ethical authority that guides our actions is not found in assertion and certainty, but rather in questioning and doubt. So, we could say that deconstruction prefers the ethical meaning offered by transcendence, rather than immanence, avoiding the arrogance of attainment while, at the same time, rejecting a metaphysics that may lead one to hopelessness and powerlessness—ethical authority is human, but this authority is structured in non-attainment.

Thirty years after the publication of "The violence of metaphysics," Derrida addressed the practical implications concerning the question of the ethical in his collection of essays entitled *The Gift of Death*. In the essay "Whom to give to (knowing not to know)," he examines Kierkegaard's reflections on the biblical story of Abraham and Issac. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard turns to this story to clarify the difference he finds between religion and ethics. Since we cannot reasonably conclude that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son is an ethical act, then it can only be understood as a religious act, which must be therefore distinct from the ethical. The basis for this distinction is that ethics, for Kierkegaard, is structured in the general, universal principles of conduct. But Abraham's relationship to God was not based upon a general principle, but a singular duty, and it is this singularity that distinguishes the religious from the generality of ethics. In this sense, Abraham's act to sacrifice his son is also a sacrifice of ethics, a dismissal of the general good in order to respond to the call of a singular God. However, in Derrida's examination of Kierkegaard's bifurcation of the general and the singular, of the ethical and the religious, he counters that one actually finds in *every* act of duty the same structure of singularity, and a similar sacrifice of ethics.

> As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others.
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> (Derrida, 1995b, 68)

If this is the case, then Kierkegaard has failed to make a clear demarcation between the religious and the ethical. Just as Abraham's chosen duty to God was a sacrifice of the ethical principles of non-violence and family care, so every chosen act of duty, in its very specificity, must unavoidably sacrifice the ethical concern for the general good. In dedicating our efforts, for example, to care for the needs of a friend, we sacrifice our concern for the general good of "all the others." Because it is a human impossibility to care for all the others, in my responding to a friend (i.e., *the other*), I sacrifice the others. Derrida concludes that ethics therefore has an inherent *aporia* that is unavoidable. The *aporia* always provides the possibility that one can easily blind oneself to the sacrifice of ethics in every ethical decision as one chooses to whom one shall be responsible. This inherent *aporia* must be ignored, in fact, in order for the everyday functioning of socio-political institutions. One must, in this sense, play a game of blindness if one wants the opportunity to play at all. As Derrida argues in the essay, "Every Other is wholly Other," those who recognize the game for what it is are simply dismissed as relativists.

> It amounts to a disavowal, whose resources, as one knows, are inexhaustible. One simply keeps on denying the aporia and antinomy, tirelessly, and one treats as nihilist, relativist, even poststructuralist, and worse still deconstructionist, all those who remain concerned in the face of such a display of good conscience.
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> (Derrida, 1995b, 85)

Do we not return here once again to our original question of attainment? The "disavowal" results from a blindness of the limits of one's ethical powers, an assumption of ethical attainment which the deconstructionist rejects. For every other we choose to respond to, there are the many others we sacrifice by our loyalties. The only hope for the ethical is therefore to recognize its inherent non-attainability, the "not yet" of ethical completion, and in so doing, to keep a vigil at the opening, the space always left remaining in the wake of one's responses to the call of *the other*. To act as a witness to this opening is to allow for the possibility of the ethical.

The question of attainment in Dōgen

It is with Derrida's understanding of non-attainment in the meaning of the ethical that we now turn to a comparison with the Japanese Buddhism of Dōgen 道元 (1200–53), where the problem of attainment was the central question of his own religious quest, and reflected the imperative placed upon the promise of attainment in the world of medieval Japan. In order to focus on Dōgen's understanding of attainment, and the ethical

implications of his understanding, we will discuss his teaching on *tathāgatagarbha,* in the *Busshō,* 仏性 (Buddha-nature) fascicle, from his masterwork, the *Shōbōgenzō,* 正法眼蔵 *(Treasury of the True Dharma Eye).* We have argued that the teaching of *tathāgatagarbha* in India may have been a reaction to the problem of the transcendence of *bodhi* in the Indian *Mahāyāna,* in order to give enlightenment an immanent meaning. In receiving the Buddhadharma from China, Dōgen was also given the doctrine of Buddha-nature as a matter of course. When reading his fascicle on Buddha-nature one gets a sense that Dōgen does not accept the teaching as he inherited it from China because he seems so intent on challenging the way Buddha-nature had been traditionally taught. It has been suggested by a number of scholars that it is because of the depth of Dōgen's enlightenment that he could essentially correct the traditional understanding of Buddha-nature, expressing its meaning from his own direct experience.[14] The most discussed example is how he purposely misreads the statement from the Indian *Nirvana Sūtra* that "All beings *have* the Buddha-nature" *(Issai shujō shitsū busshō,* 一切衆生悉有仏性 (Dōgen, 1990, vol. 1, 72) changing it to read "whole-being is Buddha-nature" (*shitsū wa busshō nari,* 悉有は仏性なり), (ibid., 73).[15] This change from the meaning "have" to the meaning "is" emphasizes the non-substantiality of the Buddha-nature, that it is not an objectifiable essence that is somehow possessed by sentient beings, but rather, all beings, both sentient and non-sentient, express Buddha-nature in their very manifestation in the world.

The idea that Dōgen's enlightenment was the basis for his alterations of the canon is a legitimate view. However, what I believe this argument does not recognize is that the teaching that Dōgen receives from the canon is not an "incorrect" teaching of the "true meaning" of Buddha-nature that Dōgen somehow discovers through his own insight, but simply the *tradition* of Buddha-nature as it is recorded in the Buddhist canon. What is said in the canon *is* the teaching of Buddha-nature. If Dōgen changes what is said in the canon, then he is no longer teaching Buddha-nature, but something else. In order not to completely negate the tradition as he received it, he does not reject the use of the locution "Buddha-nature," for such an omission would discredit the legitimacy of mind-to-mind transmission, so central to the Zen School. Instead he transforms the locution "Buddha-nature" through neologisms that reduce the term to other traditional Buddhist teachings, which Dōgen actually prefers over the teaching of Buddha-nature. He does this in three ways to represent three foundational Buddhist ideas. He teaches dependent origination *(pratītya-samutpāda)* as "whole-being Buddha-nature" (*shitsū busshō,* 悉有仏性), he teaches no-self *(anatman)* as "no-Buddha-nature" (*mu busshō,* 無仏性), and he teaches impermanence *(anitya)* as "impermanence-Buddha-nature" (*mujō busshō,* 無常仏性). In representing Buddha-nature in these ways, it would be more accurate to equate Dōgen's understanding of Buddha-nature with the traditional Buddhist teaching of suchness *(tathāta).* The basic assumption here is that Dōgen is an heir to a locution in the Buddhist tradition, an inheritance one could say, that the heir does not truly want to accept. Because he inherited the idea from a tradition he was compelled to fully embrace, however, Dōgen was essentially stuck with it, and the *Busshō* fascicle was his attempt to rid himself of a traditional locution by altering the meaning of the term itself, in order to undo the influence of the original locution without

completely negating its use as part of the tradition altogether. Beyond the *Busshō* fascicle, in fact, Dōgen rarely mentions Buddha-nature again.[16]

Our interpretation of Dōgen's approach in *Busshō* is that it is mainly an attack on the assertion of immanence that one could imply from the traditional teaching of Buddha-nature. At the same time he also rejects giving a transcendent meaning to attainment, as we found in the Indian *Mahāyāna*.[17] The schools of Zen base their legitimacy on the transmission of the Buddhadharma, traced back to the original Buddha himself. Dōgen is compelled to preserve this meaning of attainment while refuting both transcendent and immanent meanings of *bodhi*. This problem was fundamentally important to Dōgen's quest for attainment from the time he spent as a young, novice monk on Mt. Hiei, wanting to understand the meaning of original enlightenment. If *bodhi* is immanent, then there is no need for continued cultivation, and if it is transcendent there is no hope for attainment in one's lifetime. In his treatment of Buddha-nature, he must face the evidence of both views, handed down within the Buddhist tradition itself, while recognizing that both are harmful to the continued transmission of *bodhi*. It is his challenge to avoid both views while still preserving the tradition as he sees it.

Dōgen opens with an assertion of the legitimacy of mind-to-mind transmission, arguing that the truth of Buddha-nature was a teaching of the original Buddha and has been passed through mind-to-mind transmission in "an undeviating, direct descent of just fifty generations" (Dōgen, 1975, 96). Therefore the Buddha-nature teaching has (1) always been an integral part of the Dharma (historically we know it was added much later, but since Dōgen essentially replaces the later Buddha-nature teaching with new expressions of the earliest teachings, there is some accuracy in this statement from such a point of view) and (2) the teaching has not been lost or changed since its beginnings, i.e. there has been no degeneration of the Dharma as Shinran would have you believe, or evolution as Kūkai would have you believe. The irony of this opening argument of course is that while claiming that the teaching has not changed, Dōgen supports this view by altering a canonical text, making his now famous editorial move from "all sentient beings without exception *have* the Buddha-nature" to "*whole-being is* the Buddha-nature" (Dōgen, 1990, vol. 1, 72–3).

For our purposes here, let us focus our attention on Dōgen's teaching of *whole-being Buddha-nature* because it is the foundation he sets early in the fascicle on which no-Buddha-nature and impermanence-Buddha-nature are based. Whole being encompasses the manifestation of both sentient and insentient beings, so that Buddha-nature is not limited to human life or sentient life, but "both within and without sentient beings is in itself the whole being of the Buddha-nature" (Dōgen, 1975, 97). Therefore Buddha-nature is neither fully immanent nor fully transcendent, neither separate from human life nor limited to it, since it is "both within and without sentient beings." As Dōgen continues to discuss his understanding of Buddha-nature through the locution of whole being, he drops the term "Buddha-nature" altogether, so that we begin to focus not on comprehending the meaning of Buddha-nature but on the meaning of "whole being." For Dōgen, whole being is freedom, always presented in the world in every now-moment, always readily accessible. Because it is freedom, whole being is not bound to causality and karma, and therefore it never arises or ceases,[18] has no beginning or end. If whole being is not determined through causes or karma, then whole being does not depend on human consciousness to appear, and so ignorance does not hide it, nor does

enlightenment bring it into existence. “The entire world is completely free of all the dusts as objects to the self” (Dōgen, 1975, 99). If enlightenment *(bodhi)* is freedom, and freedom is whole being, then whole being is not separate from *bodhi*. This means that *bodhi* does not come into being through causes and conditions either, does not appear in a particular moment, at one time not present and at another time present.

> Were sentient being’s whole being contingent on the power of karma or on causes or on coming into being naturally, then the realization of all saints and the enlightenment of all buddhas and the eye pupils of buddhas and patriarchs also would be produced in these ways. And they are not.
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> *(Ibid.)*

There is no separation whatsoever between enlightenment and whole being, or as Dōgen asserts, “Right here there is no second person!” *(ibid.)*. Karmic consciousness does not inhibit or cover up whole being, as if karmic consciousness somehow operated independent of, or separated from, whole being. For Dōgen, the traditional view of Buddha-nature, as we found expressed in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, presents a gap, since it understands Buddha-nature as somehow hidden behind karmic consciousness. If Buddha-nature is understood as whole being, this misconception is negated, recognizing that karmic consciousness can neither bring about *whole-being Buddha-nature* nor cover it up. That is because karmic consciousness does not operate separately from whole being: “Right here, there is no second person!” The very movement of karmic consciousness is a manifestation of the Buddha-nature.

Then can one conclude from this that *bodhi* is nothing more than the movement of karmic consciousness? This is a mistaken view according to Dōgen, the view of the Senika heresy,[19] that enlightenment is a function of the movements of consciousness, as though enlightenment is somehow contained therein. If this is so, then would this mean that if the movement of karmic consciousness is a manifestation of the Buddha-nature, but enlightenment is not a manifestation of the movement of consciousness, then enlightenment is not a manifestation of the Buddha-nature? According to Dōgen, this is exactly the case.

> …who has said there is in the Buddha-nature enlightenment and awakening! Although enlightened ones and awakened ones are buddhas, still the Buddha-nature is neither awakening or enlightenment. And of course the word “enlightenment” that is used when reference is made to buddhas as being enlightened ones and awakened ones is not the awakening they speak of with their various mistaken views. And it does not regard the movement and stillness of wind and fire [consciousness] as man’s enlightenment. The true face of each buddha and the true face of each patriarch—that alone is enlightenment.
>
> (Dōgen, 1975, 100–1)

We will consider two major implications of the above statement. The first is that enlightenment is not the Buddha-nature, which seems to contradict the traditional meaning of the concept. In fact Dōgen’s understanding of Buddha-nature seems to be the

opposite of the traditional view. Instead of saying that karmic consciousness covers up Buddha-nature, clearly the view of Indian sources, Dōgen says that the movement of karmic consciousness is a manifestation of the Buddha-nature. He admits that these traditional views concerning the Buddha-nature were pervasive throughout China (and if he is actively changing the original wording of Indian *sūtras*, he must assume the same view could be found there also), but attempts in the *Busshō* fascicle to clear up what he sees as an erroneous view.

The second implication is that all enlightened ones are buddhas. There is no distinction made here between levels of enlightenment—between buddhas and bodhisattvas. This seems to run counter to the Indian *Mahāyāna* teaching that there is a difference between the level of enlightenment of a buddha and that of a bodhisattva. According to Dōgen there is no such distinction: if all enlightened ones are buddhas, and all the Zen patriarchs are enlightened ones, then all Zen patriarchs are buddhas. There is no gap here between enlightenment and Buddhahood; no one is partially on the way. Throughout the fascicles, for example, Dōgen refers to his teacher from China, Ju-ching, as *kobutsu,* 古仏(old Buddha). Even the traditional bodhisattvas of the Indian *Mahāyāna* are given buddha-level attainment in Dōgen's writings. He refers to the bodhisattva Mañjuśri in his *Hokke-ten-hokke,* 法華転法華 fascicle as *Monjushiributsu,* 文殊師利仏, "The Buddha Mañjuśri," rather than the traditional title of *Monjushiribosatsu,* 文殊師利菩薩, "Mañjuśri bodhisattva" (Dōgen, 1990, vol. 4, 429).[20] It would be difficult to find any other source in the Buddhist canon where Mañjuśri is identified in such a way.

If enlightenment is not the movement of the conscious mind, it also means that this movement does not need to be negated or stopped in order for enlightenment to be manifested. Enlightenment is the recognition of the movement of the conscious mind as the movement of the conscious mind. It is the recognition of whole being as whole being. In this sense, *whole-being Buddha-nature* does not cause enlightenment, nor is it a potentiality that lies dormant in consciousness like a seed. Rather, it is nothing more than the arising of whole being in every now-moment. Enlightenment does not arise and fall within this movement, yet it is not separate from the movement either, since enlightenment is the very recognition of the movement. Or one could say, although enlightenment is not the movement itself, there is no enlightenment without the movement, without *whole-being Buddha-nature*. As we stated earlier, if Buddha-nature is understood in this way, it can be most clearly understood as *tathatā* or suchness, and if this is the case, one would have to wonder if it is necessary to teach Buddha-nature at all. But let us continue with Dōgen's discussion of *whole-being Buddha-nature* to further clarify his understanding of attainment.

If one understands the Buddha-nature as a potential, then one is cut off from the manifestation of *whole-being Buddha-nature* in the present moment. Such a view transcendentalizes the Buddha-nature, as being a future potential that has to be uncovered or discovered through practice. But Buddha-nature does not have to be cultivated, will not be absent at one moment and present the next. If one views Buddha-nature as a future potential, one removes it from the world, exiles it to a distant, transcendental realm. There is the danger of this misinterpretation in the words of Zen master Pai-chang Huai-hai: "The Buddha said, 'If you wish to know the Buddha-nature's meaning, you should

watch for temporal conditions. If the time arrives, the Buddha-nature will manifest itself" (Dōgen, 1975, 102). But these temporal conditions are not, according to Dōgen, something that is coming in time that one must watch out for in order to be ready when the Buddha-nature somehow arrives on the scene. The Buddha-nature is these very temporal conditions, and so is always fully revealed now.

> Men of the past and present have frequently had the idea that the words *If the time arrives* mean, "await a future time when the Buddha-nature might be manifested." They say, "Continuing your practice this way, the time of the Buddha-nature's manifestation will be encountered naturally. If the time does not come, then whether you go to a master in search of the Dharma, or negotiate the Way in concentrated practice, it is not manifested." With this view they revert gainlessly to the world's red dusts, gazing vainly up at the Milky Way.
>
> (*Ibid.*, 104)

If we consider the implications of this statement in the context of the *Kōshōji* period of Dōgen's career in Japan,[21] there is an egalitarian view here that suggests a teaching provided for all persons, and an attainment available to all—the Buddha-nature is always present for everyone at all times. To see Buddha-nature in transcendent terms in time and space is to strand oneself in an unattainable fantasy, gazing off at some distant time and place like the Milky Way. Such a misguided understanding of enlightenment is found for Dōgen, in the Pureland vision, a hope for a transcendent Western paradise removed from the practitioner. But, if one recognizes the Buddha-nature presented in every moment, then the Pureland is here and now. Later in the *Busshō* fascicle Dōgen assures his audience:

> Realizing that both life and death are a combination of various conditions being manifested before your eyes, you utilize a way of complete and unrestricted freedom. This is "buddha" of the highest vehicle. Where this buddha is, there is the wondrous Land of Purity.
>
> (Dōgen, 1976b, 77)

If Buddhahood is not transcendent, not distant in time or space, but manifested in every now-moment, then one does not have to hope for Buddhahood only in another lifetime. All enlightenment is the manifestation of Buddhahood; there is no gap or distinction between bodhisattvas and buddhas; there is only Buddhahood in this very moment. In this way, Dōgen can call his master a buddha, and assert that all the Zen patriarchs are buddhas.

Given Dōgen's understanding of the meaning of enlightenment, the "not yet" description we attributed to the bodhisattva path would be rejected, not as a misinterpretation of Indian *Mahāyāna* (which we have argued is an accurate representation of that religious movement), but in the transcendentalized meaning the "not yet" attributes to enlightenment. For Dōgen, if enlightenment is not fully recognizable in the present of every now-moment, there is no possibility of enlightenment whatsoever. Either enlightenment is fully present now, or it never will be.

But Dōgen also undermines any sense of immanence in the meaning of enlightenment by attacking traditional views of Buddha-nature, both in expressing Buddha-nature as whole being rather than as an immanent, human potentiality, and by rejecting the idea that Buddha-nature can be identified with enlightenment.

Comparisons

In our comparison of the meaning of the ethical in Derrida and Dōgen, we have made the following observations. First, we found in Derrida a preference for a transcendent meaning in the possibility of the ethical, a recognition of the "not yet" in both the philosophical and practical expressions of this possibility. Therefore the immanent presence of the ethical as such is rejected; the recognition of the incompleteness of its meaning and its activity provides the very possibility of its expression. We found in this "not yet" a shared ethical vision with the "not yet" of the bodhisattva as depicted in the Indian *Mahāyāna,* which also prefers to structure the meaning of the ethical in the transcendent. Second, the ethical structures of both Derrida and the *Mahāyāna* function mainly as a space, left open for the further deepening of ethical insight. Derrida recognizes this space, for example, in the simple fact of feeding our own cats, and in so doing allowing all other cats to be ignored and thus sacrificed.[22] If this is the case, then, "I am responsible to any one (that is to say to any other) only by failing in my responsibility to all the others, to the ethical and political generality. And I can never justify this sacrifice…" (Derrida, 1995b, 70). Therefore the ethical can never be fully attained in the concrete limitations of human agency; all ethical acts fail ethics. But Derrida avoids an attitude of hopelessness—being aware of this limitation is also ethically beneficial. In recognizing the inherent limitation and resultant injustice of every ethical act, there is always the possibility of going beyond the act, because in the very recognition of incompleteness, further action remains open. In the impossibility of feeding all other cats there is always the space left open to improve one's response to the needs of other cats—the possible is, therefore, left open by the impossible. Similarly, the bodhisattva takes on a vow to attain the impossible—the salvation of all sentient beings. Over the course of many lifetimes, the bodhisattva continually evolves the skills to be of greater and greater benefit to the needs of other sentient beings. Can such a task ever truly be completed; is attainment as it is structured in the *Mahāyāna* truly possible? This does not seem to matter; the bodhisattva lives as though it were possible.

Third, in the vision of the *Mahāyāna,* the ethical is given an evolutionary structure, a necessary evolution, once non-retrogression is achieved. That is, there is an understanding in the *Mahāyāna* that the bodhisattva is on a path of ethical progress, evolving towards the final attainment of Buddhahood. But there is no evolutionary meaning given to the ethical in Derrida. There is, in the opening left by *différance,* in the "liberty of the question," the possibility of new ethical meaning, but the space does not belong to the "domain of the ethical," and is therefore not necessary. Although there is a transcendent structure given to ethical possibility, Derrida avoids the hopelessness of traditional transcendent meaning given to the ethical. He also avoids the arrogance of immanence by undermining philosophical assertions of presence. But we cannot say that Derrida's vision is one of hope either; we find neither hope nor hopelessness, neither

arrogance nor self-deprecation in the project of deconstruction.[23] In contrast, the *Mahāyāna* vision of the ethical in the cultivation of *bodhi,* although immersed in transcendent imagery, is filled with hope for the impossible. The bodhisattva is like a tiny bird, fully intent on putting out a raging fire, one beak-full of water at a time.

However, we found in Dōgen, a Japanese heir of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, a rejection of the "not yet" embraced in the traditional Indian path of the bodhisattava. Much of this rejection is inherited through the promise of attainment in Chan Buddhism, but Dōgen seems insistent on refuting any distinctions traditionally made between bodhisattvas and buddhas, and replaces traditional Buddha-nature, as an immanent potential, with *whole-being Buddha-nature (shitsū busshō),* the interdependence of all being at every now-moment. As such, Buddha-nature is not equated with enlightenment, but with what Indian Buddhists called suchness *(tathāta).* This allows Dōgen to refute any meaning given to *bodhi* that places it in either a transcendent or immanent structure. The promise of attainment is to be found in the here and now, and this would also mean that all ethical possibility is found in the here and now. But attainment for Dōgen does not mean that the ethical is ever closed off in the sense of a kind of completion. We also find an ethical space in Dōgen's understanding of awakening in the recognition that enlightenment is not separate from the continual manifestation of *whole-being Buddha-nature*. We find in the Shoaku Makusa, 諸悪莫作 *(Not Doing Wrongs)* fascicle, for example, that Dōgen recognizes that first, ethical action is not based upon any devised system of ethics, but is rather a natural expression of enlightenment.

> Remember, [teaching] that sounds like *"Do not commit wrongs"* is the Buddha's right Dharma. This [teaching] *"Do not commit wrongs"* was not intentionally initiated, and then intentionally maintained in its present form, by the common man: when we hear teaching that has [naturally] become the preaching of bodhi, it sounds like this.
>
> (Dōgen, trans. Nishijima and Cross, 1994, 99)

Second, the possibilities of ethical action are not limited by a predetermined set of responses to the world, but are realized in the moment they are called for. Right action is only right in relation to the situation at hand, and so ethical possibility has no prescribed meaning, but is left open in order to respond most effectively to the needs of the moment.

> …there has never been any kind of right that is realized before hand and then waits for someone to do it. There is none among the many kinds of right that fails to appear at the very moment of doing right. The myriad kinds of right have no set shape, but they converge on the place of doing right faster than iron to a magnet…
>
> (*Ibid.,* 103)

However, in contrast to Derrida's argument that all ethical action must, at the same time, sacrifice those not included, Dōgen's recognition of *whole-being Buddha-nature* indicates that no action for an other is disconnected or separate from all the others; in our response to any other, all the others are included in whole being and are therefore included within our right action. Nor do we sacrifice all the others through a choice of a

particular other; there is no choosing to respond to one and thus choosing to ignore another, but there is only the responding to the needs of any given moment that is presented to us. Feeding our cat is the right action of the now-moment; when we see that our cat needs food, we respond to that need presented before us, and so the action, in this sense, excludes nothing.

Notes

1 See Bk 1, Ch. 6, 1096b in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Greek word for attainment in this text is κτητόυ, meaning, "that may be gotten."

2 The historicity of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is made plain if we look to more recent assessments of its value. For example, Bertrand Russell, in his work *A History of Western Philosophy,* suggests that "The book appeals to the respectable middle-aged, and has been used by them, especially since the seventeenth century, to repress the ardours and enthusiasms of the young. But to a man with any depth of feeling it cannot but be repulsive" (Russell, 1945, 173).

3 "Neither our salvation nor our beatitude is here present, but 'we wait for it' in the future, and we wait 'with patience,' precisely because we are surrounded by evils which patience must endure until we come to where all good things are sources of inexpressible happiness and where there will be no longer anything to endure. Such is to be our salvation in the hereafter, such our final blessedness. It is because the philosophers will not believe in the beatitude which they cannot see that they go on trying to fabricate here below an utterly fraudulent felicity built upon virtue filled with pride and bound to fail them in the end" (Augustine, 1958, 442–3).

4 Hobbes determined that the human good was founded in the mutual adherence to sovereign-based covenants, while Mill finds the good in utilitarian actions aimed at general human happiness, and Kant in the rational application of the categorical imperative.

5 For example, in the final pages of *Toward the Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche argues, "Has not man's determination to belittle himself developed apace precisely since Copernicus? Alas, his belief that he was unique and irreplaceable in the hierarchy of beings has been shattered for good: he has become an animal, quite literally and without reservations; he who, according to earlier belief, had been almost God ('child of God,' 'God's own image')" (Nietzsche, 1956, 291).

6 The *arahant's* attainment of liberation according to the Discourses *(Nikāyas)* is structured as a repetition of the historical Buddha's experience of enlightenment during the three watches. For each watch there is a building towards final release: in the first watch there is, through retrocognition, the knowledge of one's past lives; in the second watch, through the clairvoyance of the divine eye, there is the knowledge of the causal dependent arising and ceasing of all phenomena; and in the third watch, through the knowledge of the removal of the defilements or corruptions, final release is attained. The corruptions include desire, becoming, and ignorance—those ethical aspects of human being that impede attainment. Attainment is therefore directly related to an ethical perfection. So complete and final is this attainment that the Discourses often proclaim it with the same formulated phrase: "and he knows: Birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done is what had to be done, there is nothing further here" (*Dīgha Nikāya,* in Walshe, 1987, 108).

7 Consider for example, the birth story from the fifth-century *Jātakamālā,* how the Buddha in a previous life as the woman Rūpyāvatī cuts off her own breasts to feed a starving mother and child (Lopez, 2004, 159–71).

8 See, for example, from the *Majhimanikāya,* "The Simile of the Saw" *(Kakacūpama Sutta),* where the Buddha teaches his disciples, "even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by

limb with a two handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. Herein, bhikkhus, you should train thus: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness; without inner hate'" (Majhima Nykāya, in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995, 223).

9 The early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts can be seen primarily as inspirational literature, giving encouragement to those who take up the bodhisattva path, warning them of the great effort required to face the challenges in lifetimes of sacrifice.

10 See, for example, the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, where the Buddha teaches his bodhisattva audience, "Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleśas, have a tathāgatagarbha that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own" (Lopez, 1995, 96).

11 For example, the *Tendai* notion of original enlightenment, supported by the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching, also promoted laxity and corruption within the sect. This led to certain prominent desertions, most notably the case of Dōgen, who struggled with the Tendai understanding of original enlightenment.

12 Nietzsche assailed the claims of rationality in the philosophical tradition and argued that such views were blind to the underlying perspectivism behind such truth claims, a perspectivism fueled by human will to power. Heidegger turned to phenomenology in order to reveal the existential dimensions of human life while avoiding the metaphysical language of previous philosophers.

13 See, for example, Derrida's treatment of Plato's Pharmakon in *Dissemination* or Rousseau's understanding of supplement in *Of Grammatology*.

14 Abe Masao's treatment is the most recognized example of this position. See Abe, 1971.

15 Cf. *ibid*.

16 It is interesting to note that right in the *Busshō* fascicle, Dōgen recognizes the rejection of this teaching in some of his contemporaries and attacks them for the omission. He states, "There are many places even head priests of Zen temples who pass entire lifetimes without once uttering the words 'Buddha-nature.' Some of them say, 'People who only listen to teachings of the Buddha Dharma may speak about Buddha-nature, but not monks who devote themselves to Zen practice.' Such people are true animals. What a pack of devils, straying into our way of the buddha-tathagatas and defiling it!" (Dōgen, 1976b, 102.) Here, we find Dōgen's traditionalism quite apparent.

17 The view that the Buddha-nature is neither transcendent nor immanent is also found in Abe's treatment of the Buddha-nature fascicle, although his concerns with the text are not focused on the ethical implications of this view.

18 From the standpoint of causation, phenomena can be said to arise and cease (the *Hīnayāna* view). But from the standpoint of whole being, there is no arising and ceasing because all phenomena are without own being, and whole being is the continual manifestation of phenomenal interdependency (The *Hua-yen* view of totality). Therefore, there is no arising and ceasing of whole being, and so whole being is free from causality and karma.

19 The heresy originates from an Indian named Senika who argued that the mind, unlike the body (form), is immutable and the source of enlightenment and liberation.

20 The *Hokke-ten-hokke* fascicle is excluded from the 75 fascicle version of the *Shōbōgenzō,* edited by Dōgen's disciple Ejō, but it is included in the later 95 fascicle version, edited by Kōzen in 1690.

21 A number of scholars have commented on a turn in Dōgen's career between the period he taught at Kōshōji and the end of his life in Eiheiji. Hakamaya Noriaki, for example, claims that this change was radical, and that Dōgen's Eiheiji teaching was a more authentic expression of Buddhism than his early Kōshōji material. (See Hakamaya's argument discussed in Hubbard and Swanson, 1997.) Heinrich Dumoulin argues that this move was

marked by depression and “a break in the quality of of his literary pursuits…” (Dumoulin, 1990, 62). However, Steven Heine finds both the “Renewal Theory” of Hakamaya and the “Decline Theory” of Dumoulin to be wanting in their oversimplification of Dôgen’s career (Heine, 76–82).

22 Derrida asks, “How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant?” (Derrida, 1995b, 71).

23 This might seem to contradict Derrida’s later messianic writing, but hope implies an expectation of what is to come, undermining one’s readiness to receive the other as other. Derrida avoids this interpretation of the messianic, as we find for example in the final essay of *Specters of Marx,* “apparition of the inapparent.” Derrida states, “if one could *count* on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program” (Derrida, 1994, 169).

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